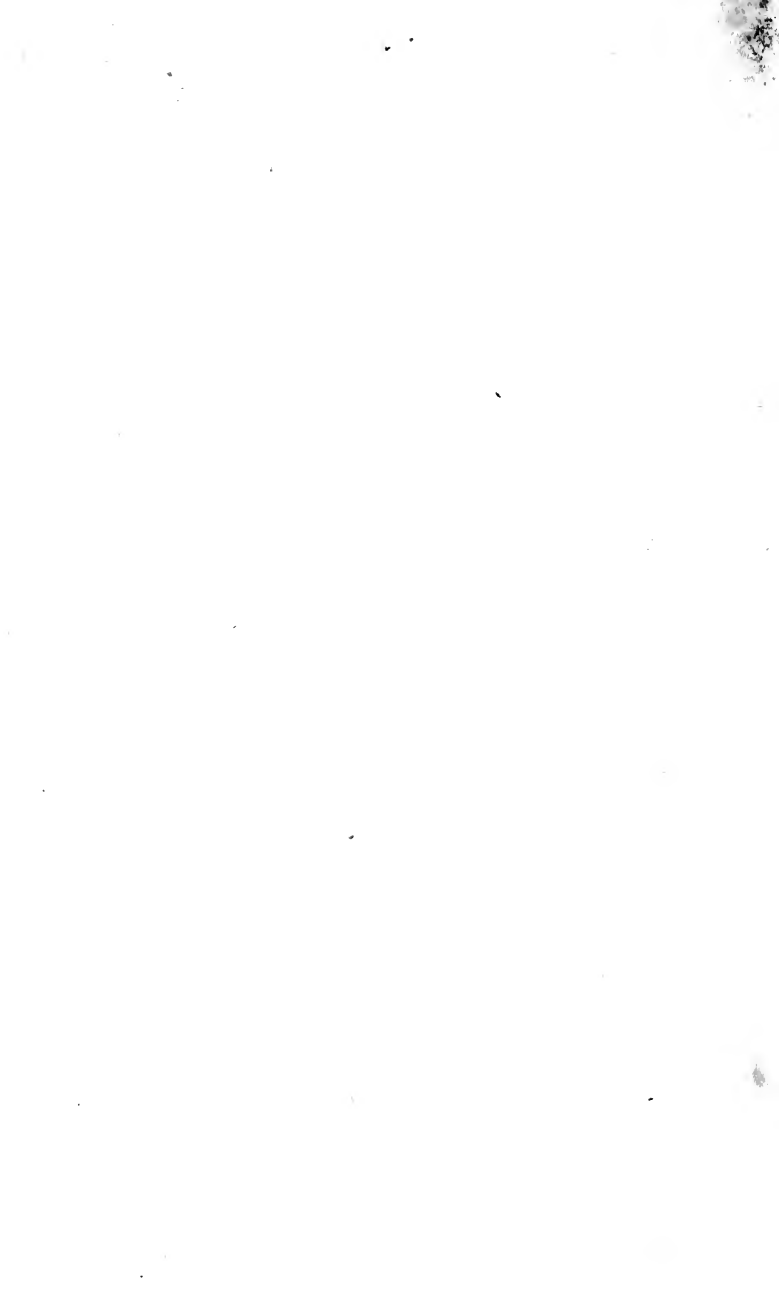




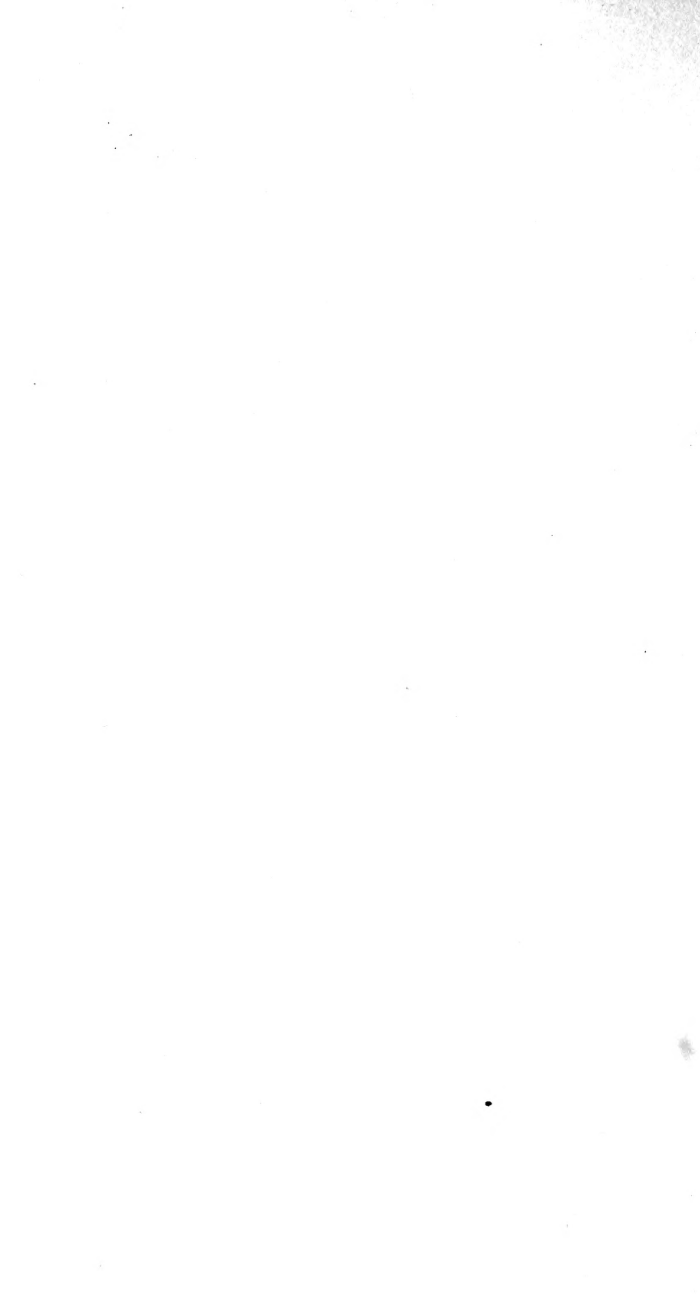
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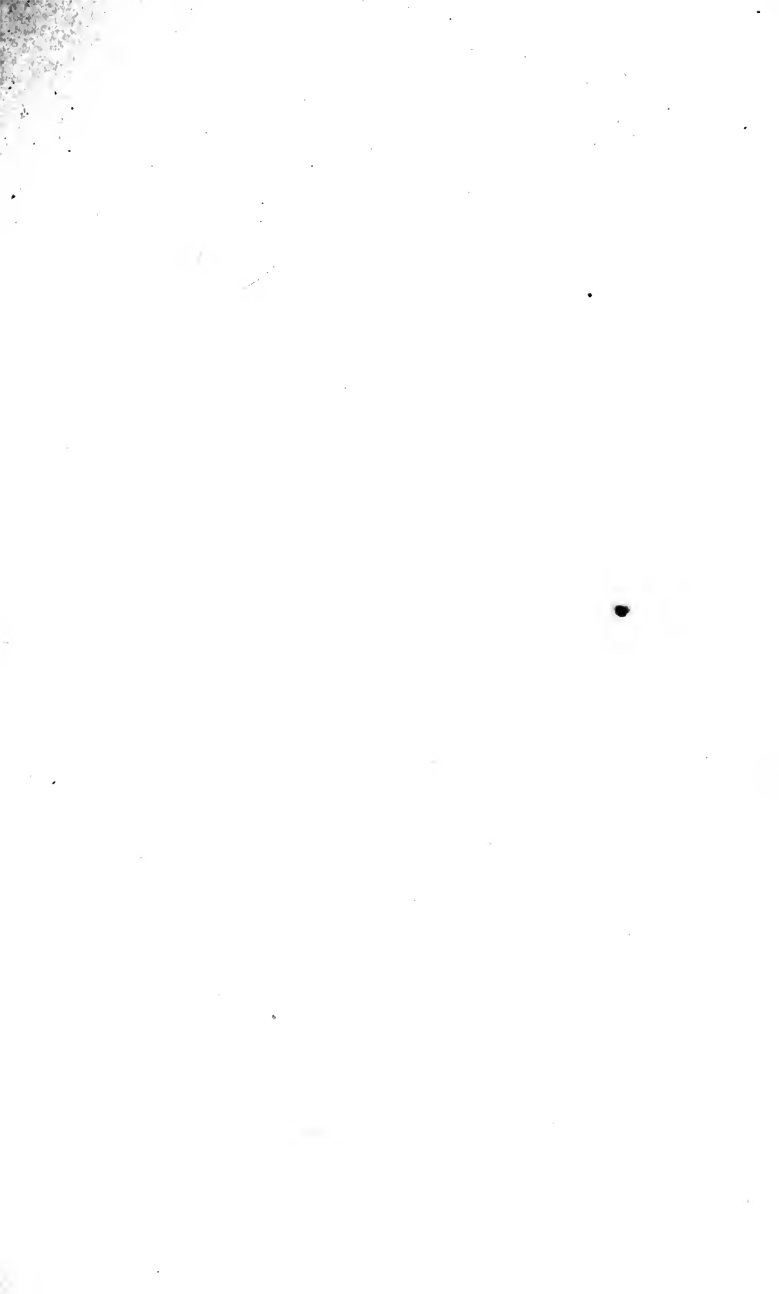
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THE
BANKER'S WIFE;

OR,
COURT AND CITY.

A NOVEL.

BY
MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF
"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "MRS. ARMITAGE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE BANKER'S WIFE;

OR,

COURT AND CITY.

CHAPTER I.

My 'right honourable' daughter!

NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS.

Distracted as Mrs. Hamlyn had been by apprehensions of various kinds at the moment of her return to town, her well-regulated mind became gradually restored to composure on observing the perfect self-possession of her husband,—his unmitigated attention to his parliamentary duties, and a thousand minor

evidences of the cessation of all pressure in his affairs. The crisis, from whatever cause it might have arisen, was evidently passed. Under such circumstances, even the methodical regularity of her household proved an advantage,—soothing her spirits as by the measured rocking of a lullaby.

Moreover, all was so bright, so prosperous, so sunshiny around her, that it seemed absurd to look out for breakers when launched on that glassy sea, and under a sky so propitious. Flattering as was her position in London life, the banker's wife had never felt the value of her good acceptance in society till called upon to present her daughter. The kindness with which Jydia was welcomed into the world, filled her mother with gratitude towards the frivolous circles she had hitherto regarded with indifference; and she had the satisfaction to perceive that the girl so flatteringly noticed in compliment to her parents soon became a general favourite from her own merits. Seldom had a *débutante* equally lovely appeared in the *beau-monde*,

so free from the affectations of the day; and the fashionable world, forewarned in her favour by Lady Rotherwood, (who, having taken a fancy for her at Dean Park, and having no children of her own to occupy her attention, was doubly interested in her success in life,) accorded to Mrs. Hamlyn a new species of consideration as the mother of the most popular beauty of the season.

At all this, Mrs. Hamlyn could afford to rejoice; for she saw that the adulation of the world exercised no evil influence on the disposition of her right-minded child; that by the maturity of Lydia, she had gained a friend; that, in whatever circle they found themselves, *she* was the first object to her daughter; that *her* slightest opinion outweighed the whole chorus of flatterers and adorers; and that she had only to appear thoughtful or indisposed, to impose an instantaneous sadness upon the light-hearted young girl. Her perception of this determined the banker's wife to exert herself to

the utmost to appear cheerful and contented, while escorting her daughter to those scenes of fashionable resort, in which it was Mr. Hamlyn's desire they should attain an honourable distinction.

For there existed a source of anxiety which rendered it difficult for the affectionate mother to array herself in smiles for the opera or ball-room. Aware that the submission of her son Henry to his father's requirements had been a matter of compulsion, she was not slow to discern from the tone of his correspondence, that he was giving way to despondency. As much as the pride of the banker was centered in the prospects of his eldest son, was that of Mrs. Hamlyn embarked in Harry's high reputation and noble elevation of character. She revered almost as much as she loved this child of her affections; and while noticing with anxiety the growing incoherency of his letters, felt indescribably mortified in the conviction that, by the relaxation of his efforts and infirmity of his health, he was about to disap-

point the well-known confidence of the university in his power.

Aware, from certain harsh expressions hazarded by her husband at the moment of Henry's refractoriness, that Mr. Hamlyn was out of conceit of the academic honours which he regarded as the origin of his second son's conceiving himself too accomplished a gentleman for Lombard Street, it was not to *him* she could turn for comfort in her cares; and whenever letters arrived bearing the Cambridge postmark, (how different in style, in spirits, nay even in handwriting, from those she had received from the exulting traveller during his Italian expedition!) — all she could do was to retreat in silence to her room, and weep unsuspected over the blighted prospects of the most gifted of her children.

For such indulgence of her feelings, however, she had little leisure. Day after day, evening after evening, the anxious mother had engagements to keep. No fashionable party was considered complete without the

presence of the beautiful Miss Hamlyn, whose healthy, happy, intelligent countenance seemed to renovate the consciousness of youth and enjoyment for all whose hearts were brightened by her smiles. The table in Cavendish Square was covered with invitations ; and at the first Royal ball given after Lydia's presentation at Court, the wife and lovely daughter of the member for Bars-thorpe were noticed by the papers as having attracted universal admiration.

Richard Hamlyn's desire that his family should maintain a distinguished place in the fashionable world was consequently gratified,—perhaps exceeded. All he ambitioned was that his wife and daughter should reflect credit upon the firm of Hamlyn and Co.,—and assist in the support of that aërial fabric which through life he had been labouring to uphold. That they would do *more*, he neither calculated nor desired. Like most people whose attention is absorbed by a vital interest, he had no thought to bestow on collateral projects. All he had cared for during

the last five and twenty years, was to preserve the credit of a ruined family, and save from the Gazette,—by fair means or foul,—an insolvent firm; and engrossed by the fatal nature of his expedients, had not leisure to indulge in any luxury or complication of ambitions. — It had never struck him, for instance, while labouring to gild the worldly prospects of the future Hamlyns of Dean Park, that the name might derive lustre from the brilliant marriage of his daughter.

The only brother of the banker was a dignitary of the Church, who rarely quitted his preferment in the county of Durham. His sisters were married in a moderate sphere of life,—the one residing also in the North, the other in Devonshire; and, accustomed to regard the alliances of his family with unexulting eyes, he had always settled it with himself that Lydia and Harriet would become the wives of country gentlemen, or mercantile men of solid condition. To aspire beyond this, would have been at variance with his plans.

When, therefore, soon after Lydia's *début*, he found her attract to his house a higher order of guests than had yet sought his acquaintance, he was more startled than pleased. It appeared inconceivable to the banker that personal distinction should accrue to *him* from so insignificant a source! Nor, absorbed as he was at that moment by personal cares of the most poignant nature, had he yet found time to accommodate his views to the new position of his family, when the startling intelligence was communicated by his wife, that the Marquis of Dartford requested permission to pay his addresses to their daughter!—

The proposals were made in the most flattering manner. A letter from the Marchioness was delivered by her sister, Lady Rotherwood, to the banker's wife, fully authorizing the views of her son, to whom her consent had been applied for at the moment of her recent convalescence. All she requested, in the event of his being so fortunate as to make himself acceptable to

one described by various members of her family as the most charming girl in England, —was, that the marriage should be delayed till the expiration of Gerald's minority, early in the ensuing month of June.

It was one night, on returning from a ministerial party, and learning that Mr. Hamlyn was still up and writing in his study, that this intelligence was communicated by his wife.

“ Ramsay informed me you were busy writing ? ” — said Mrs. Hamlyn, almost hesitating whether to enter the room, on perceiving that the banker's table was covered with papers.

“ I have only been half an hour returned from the House, and have letters to answer ! ” was his cold reply ; for it was an understood thing that none of the family were to intrude upon his retirement, unless by special invitation. When therefore he saw his wife, unabashed by his abruptness, quietly take her seat by the fireside, in spite of the lateness of the hour and the full dress of which it

was time to disencumber herself, he felt that something important must have transpired ; and almost dreaded lest, through the indiscretion of Lord Crawley and gossiping of Lady Rotherwood, something might have reached his wife of his extraordinary solicitations in Spilsby's favour, and their still more extraordinary frustration by the opposition of the clerk.

This unpleasant surmise was strengthened by the first words uttered by Mrs. Hamlyn.

“ You have perhaps been already apprized by Lord Crawley,” said she, “ of the circumstance for which Lady Rotherwood this morning afforded *me* some preparation ? ”—

Satisfied that the mischief was done, the banker was nerving himself to rebut, by harsh reproof, any comments or inquiries his wife might seem disposed to hazard on an affair peculiarly within his province, both as a man of business and politician ; when, little aware of the alarm she had excited, Mrs. Hamlyn hastened to explain her-

self; and the intelligence struck with double force upon the father's mind, after the humiliating panic by which it had been preceded! —For once, he was overpowered by natural emotion.

To accord his unqualified consent, was a matter of course. All that was at present required of him was to sanction the more familiar visits at his house of the noble suitor; Mrs. Hamlyn having conditioned with the young lover that no positive answer should be exacted from Lydia, till a month's intimate companionship enabled her to judge the nature of their mutual impressions. Scarcely another father in London, however, but, under such circumstances, would have been moved to seek an interview with his daughter, in order, before he slept, to congratulate her upon her brilliant prospects, and fold more tenderly and anxiously to his heart the girl thus trembling on the verge of womanhood with its matronly responsibilities. But Hamlyn, with his wonted circumspection, contented himself

with expressing to his wife his conviction that so “capital a match” would in the sequel be circumvented by the interference of prudent friends; or by the natural fickleness of a boy of Lord Dartford’s age, for whose hand all the mothers and chaperons in London were barefacedly manœuvring.

“Do not let Lydia set her heart upon it!” was his parting counsel, as his wife, after due discussion of the measures to be adopted on the morrow, prepared to retire for the night. “I have a presentiment that something will occur to blight so brilliant a prospect. —The thing is too preposterous, —too utterly out of our sphere, —and will raise up against us too many enemies and animosities, to admit of hoping that all will end as we desire. Tell her, however, that nothing shall be neglected on my part to forward her interests on the occasion.”

Alas! it was not on her “interests” that either Lydia or her thoughtful mother were intent at that moment! —At such an epoch of her life, the young girl wished to find herself

folded for the first time with paternal warmth to the heart of her father ; and deep was Mrs. Hamlyn's mortification at having to return to the dressing-room, where her daughter was anxiously awaiting her, unaccompanied by him who, as the comptroller of the destinies of the family, ought also to have been the leading influence of its affections.

“ Your father, dearest, gives his gratified consent, and will in all things second our wishes!”—said Mrs. Hamlyn, in a subdued voice, unwilling to damp the joy of the agitated girl by a more explicit transmission of his message.

“ But he is pleased with Lord Dartford's conduct on the occasion?”—persisted Lydia. “ He feels as you do, dearest mother, that nothing can have been more feeling or considerate than his conduct towards us all throughout the affair?”—

“ Your father expressed the highest opinion of him, and his unqualified approval. As Walter's friend, Lord Dartford has long commanded an interest in Mr. Hamlyn's mind.

To-morrow, at dinner, they will meet, and every thing be mutually expressed which can confirm this friendly feeling."

"To-morrow, at dinner!" thought Lydia, whose young heart was naturally excited to unusual emotions of tenderness by all that was passing. "What! not *one* day's respite from business,—not *one* day's abstinence from the city,—to afford his countenance and support to his daughter at such a moment!"—

Moderate, however, as was the banker's avowal of surprise and triumph in presence of his wife, no sooner had he bolted himself anew within the privacy of his study, than he gave way to the wildest emotion. *His* daughter a marchioness!—The grand-daughter of Walter Hamlyn the banker,—a marchioness!—in the enjoyment of forty thousand a-year,—high precedence,—noble estates,—gorgeous jewels,—all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious rank!—The name of Hamlyn, of Dean Park, about to be connected with the hereditary peerage of the realm!—What would the Vernons say; and how, henceforward, would

the Elvaston family preserve their frigid distance?—Already, he seemed to behold the future Marquis and Marchioness of Dartford arriving in triumph at Ormeau!—

“My father would have been proud indeed had he lived to see this day!” naturally escaped him. But those words and that inauspicious name recalled him to the bitterer realities of life!—An involuntary shudder betrayed the sudden chill arresting the unusual expansion of his heart, as he reflected on all he had to fear, on all that might overtake both him and his during the interval to elapse before this splendid alliance could be accomplished!—The consciousness which, for years past, had tinged with bitterness the luscious cup of his enjoyments every time he attempted to raise it to his lips, exercised its usual influence; and the head of the ambitious banker, which for a moment had uplifted itself with proud and gratifying anticipations, was again humbled to the dust.

For he knew that a touch, a word, a whisper

might at any moment destroy the glittering fabric of his fortunes, and overwhelm beneath its ruins himself and all who bore his name!—

In the anguish of his heart, he now cursed the rashness which had induced him to make his recent overtures to government, ere certain of reaping the fruits of his self-abasement ; and the surprise with which Lord Crawley had a few days before received his announcement that the person for whom he had so eagerly solicited the consulship, was prevented by unforeseen circumstances from profiting by the concession, recurred disagreeably to his mind.

“ This clerk of yours, my dear Hamlyn, must have a prodigious idea of the advantages to be derived from sticking to your strong box !” said he, with a smile.—“ *Your* patronage, I suspect, carries more weight with it than ours. However, having, through your propositions, placed my paw upon this little windfall, I shall clench it fast for one of my nephews,—a poor Honourable with a wife and half a dozen children, who is not quite so sure

as this Mr. Spilsby of yours, of the crumbs that fall from the table of Hamlyn and Co !”

Every syllable of this, though uttered at random, spoke daggers to the diseased mind of the banker. Imputing undue significance to the idle banter of a man whose success in political life was mainly owing to the pungent pleasantries and slapdash recklessness of his parliamentary eloquence, Richard Hamlyn trembled to reflect that he whose suspicions were thus unluckily awakened, was uncle to the Marquis of Dartford !—

On the morrow, however, he had so far recovered his presence of mind, and chalked out the path to pursue, as to bear his part, in the aptest manner, in the ceremonial of receiving Lord Dartford for the first time in the character of a son-in-law ;—and the young lovers already gratified by the affectionate warmth of Mrs. Hamlyn and triumphant joy of Walter, had no fault to find with the calmer but scarcely less strongly expressed approval of the banker.

The whole establishment in Cavendish Square seemed suddenly startled into life, as by the touch of the torch of Prometheus, by this surprising glorification. Already, Lady Rotherwood had confided it in strictest secrecy to a sufficient number of intimate friends to secure the report being bruited through all the clubs of the West End ; while Captain Hamlyn was, on his part, too deeply interested that it should reach the ears of Lord and Lady Vernon to oppose a *very* firm contradiction to the rumour. That it *did* reach their ears, a very few days sufficed to demonstrate. Apprehensive that their bitter disappointment on the occasion might be suspected, and expose them to ridicule, Lucinda and her mother hastened with their congratulations to Cavendish Square ; as if of opinion that they could not efface by too prompt or too servile assiduity their previous slights towards the long-contemned family at Dean Park.

No sooner, however, was it understood in the coteries of London that an engagement between the beautiful *débutante*, “the lovely

and accomplished Miss Hamlyn,” and the young Marquis of Dartford was avowed by all parties, than malice began to whet the weapons usually exercised on such occasions by the idle and malicious ;—the former to divert their leisure,—the latter to gratify their spite. Not a dowager at Almack’s but whispered confidentially to her sister chaperons that “ the young Marquis had been shamefully taken in—that he was not of age—a mere boy—a mere *child*,—weak in intellect, though strong in wilfulness ;—whereas the Hamlyns were crafty, artful people, who from his boyhood had been trying to entrap him ; profiting for the purpose by the influence of their eldest son over the poor lad,—first as his Eton fag, afterwards as his cornet in the Blues. The whole was a scheme,—a cunning scheme,—devised among these presuming *parvenus* ! The artful banker, conniving with the manœuvring mother, had compelled their vain, silly son to bring down this young nobleman perpetually to Dean Park, where Miss Hamlyn was incessantly thrown in his way ; till, in the sequel, they

would not hear of the Marquis's quitting the house before he had made formal proposals to the young lady."

Such was the mendacious version of the affair sanctioned by the smiles and nods of the Vernons wherever they went ; Lord Vernon having accused himself at Brooks's of being the most unfortunate of mankind, — *not* because his wife was again unsuccessful in netting a marquis, but because this disproportioned alliance of the Hamlyn family would thrust them forward so offensively in the county, that he feared he should be no longer able to overlook the vicinity of Dean Park to the Hyde !—

There were those, it is true, who, moved by the genuine representations of Lady Rotherwood, viewed the affair in a more legitimate light ; and saw that it was precisely *because* she had never been forced upon his notice, that the young Marquis, proud of his own good taste in discovering the merits of the natural and unpretending Lydia, had resolved to assert his independence of the flimsy pre-

judices of fashionable fastidiousness by making her his wife. Others, warned by their parental experience, applauded the wisdom of the Dartford family in according their unhesitating consent to a respectable marriage ; considering that the Marquis was an only son, the last of his race, and with a sufficient tendency towards the break-neck and knocker-wrenching exploits of the day, to render his early settlement in life a matter of first-rate importance.

Meanwhile, all was happiness in Cavendish Square ! Few spots and few moments more bright and auspicious than the home of opulent parents, under the excitement of the happy betrothment of a beloved daughter ! On all sides, congratulations,—gifts,—flowers,—the affectionate welcome and professions of new connections, and the triumphant joy of old !—Mrs. Hamlyn, instead of lamenting the premature settlement in life that was to deprive her of her daughter's company, felt inexpressibly relieved by the certainty of placing her Lydia in a happy home,

under the protection of an adoring husband, instead of seeing her exposed to the precarious chances of her present fortunes. Walter was almost wild with delight at a connection purchased by no degrading sacrifices, yet at once securing happiness to his sister and support to his own projects of alliance; while Henry wrote from Cambridge an expression of melancholy delight that at least *one* member of his family was happy and prosperous.

Even poor Miss Creswell lost sight of the fate of her annuity, in the expectation of beholding her beloved pupil a Marchioness; and when Lydia's letter, announcing her perfect happiness, reached Burlington Manor, (accompanied by a few lines from Lord Dartford, containing arch allusions to the sledge-party, and a certain dried branch of Arabian jessamine, which existed, and was to exist so long as he lived, in his pocket-book, after having originally flourished and been presented to him, in the conservatory at Burlington,) — the good

old Colonel not only shed tears of joy at the news, but protested that the moment he had got through his engagements to his neighbours at the Vicarage, Ormeau, and Gratwycke House, he would hurry up to town to bestow his blessing upon the kind-hearted and lovely girl, who was dear to him almost as a daughter.

“You must bear me company, Ellen,” said he, “and make my little Lydia’s acquaintance. I have always been in hopes you would come to love each other as sisters. Though you weren’t over and above civil to the young Captain when he was at Dean, you had certainly so far an excuse, that whatever attention you might show to *him*, you were obliged to extend to the Marquis. However, ’tis some comfort, at all events, that you agree with me in thinking young Dar’ford a trump,—a fine, free-hearted young fellow,—gentleman to the backbone! So the sooner we go and offer our congratulations to poor dear Mrs. Hamlyn (who won’t know whether to laugh or cry at losing such a daughter,—bless

her poor heart!—and gaining such a son-in-law) the better. I'm free to own that I love to see two young folks a-courting, when there's nothing likely to thwart their courtship; and as you won't promise me the pleasure of any billing and cooing by my *own* fireside, faith, I must go and make the best use of my spectacles at my friend Hamlyn's!"

Opportunity for observation was certainly not wanting; for every day, punctual to the moment sanctioned by Mrs. Hamlyn, the Marquis's Brougham drove up to the door; and it would have been difficult to decide which looked the brighter, gayer, or sweeter,—the young lover, or the bouquet of rare flowers with which he came provided to propitiate the happy Lydia. Till the hour arrived for Lydia to ride with her brother Walter, or drive with her mother, Lord Dartford remained, listening to her sweet singing or sweeter conversation. Dinner-time brought him again, when no engagements interfered, to rejoin the family circle for the remainder of the day.

It is true the family circle was rarely a private one; and now, in addition to Mr. Hamlyn's usual formal dinner-parties and political banquets, it became necessary to return the series of entertainments by which Lord Dartford's family chose to mark their approval of a match, which, unable to prevent, they were wise enough to take the merit of sanctioning. In addition to Lady Rotherwood, who really loved both her nephew and the object of his choice and rejoiced in their prospects of happiness, a variety of noble cousins made eager interest for the eventual civilities of Dartford Hall, by the promptitude of their attentions to the future bride; and day after day did the *Morning Post* record, for the edification of the polite world, that the "Duke and Duchess of This, or Earl and Countess of That, with the Earl and Countess of Rotherwood, the Marquis of Dartford, and Lord Crawley, had honoured Mr. Hamlyn with their company to dinner, at his mansion in Cavendish Square."

“Did you ever see any thing to equal the pretensions of those Hamlyns!” was now the cry of Lady Bondwell and her class. “See how they have gradually wormed themselves into the very highest place in the fashionable world!—Step by step, how all their progress has been calculated!—How cunningly must they have crawled, and crept, and smiled, and whispered,—to stock their acquaintance with a sufficient quantity of lords and ladies to enable them to cut all their old friends! First, they pushed their son in the world, that the son might push his sister; and the children, having established themselves so brilliantly in life, will push on their parents in return!”—

“Ay, ay, ay!” was Sir Benjamin Bondwell’s reply to these insinuations of his indignant spouse; “but you won’t get *me* out of Russell Square a day the sooner for that! *I* know the cost of these lordly acquaintances to a banker. One must pay through the nose for a duke, and be out of pocket many a long hundred to secure a pack of royal highnesses

to the list of one's fêtes, after the fashion of that poor deluded man, Hamlyn. 'Keep your shop, and your shop will keep *you*!' says the proverb; but while keeping such cursed fine company, a banker has a hard matter to keep himself out of the Gazette! They tell *me* Hamlyn's to be made a baronet in the next batch!—Why not a peer at once?—A Lord, on 'change, would be a novelty!—If I *did* sell myself to government, it should not be too cheap!"—

But Lady Bondwell, as the lady-consort of a mere Peg-Nicholson-knight, was overwhelmed at the idea of having to yield precedence to Lady Hamlyn.

"'Tis a hard matter to guess *where* their ambition will stop!" cried she. "But I've heard of people who, by putting all their silver into the tankard, had nothing left to drink in it when 'twas turned out of the mould."—

By the expiration of the month, at the end of which Lord Dartford was enabled to announce to his mother the certainty of her

speedily becoming a dowager, since he was an accepted man, and happier in Lydia's affections than in his numberless sources of earthly happiness,—a thousand ill-natured attacks had been made in the Sunday papers, and other outlets of the envy, hatred, and malice of society, upon the *mésalliance* of the young marquis, and the presumption of a banker's family in pretending to commingle its three emblematic balls of Lombardy with those of a coronet !

Unused, in the respectable obscurity of his earlier days, to this species of notoriety, Richard Hamlyn shrunk in agony from the blistering touch of the branding-iron ; and even performed a pilgrimage to the house of the solicitors to whom he had referred Miss Creswell and her annuity, to consult them respecting the prosecution of the offenders. But Messrs. Wigwell and Slack had, fortunately, sufficient business of the firm of Hamlyn and Co. already on their hands, to be able to dispense with the job ; and consequently disinterestedly advised the banker to pocket

the affront of being called a banker, in English somewhat less courtly than that he was in the habit of hearing at his dinner-table in Cavendish Square.

“The operation of clearing out a cess-pool,” observed the shrewd lawyer, “though essential to the well-being of the community, is often fatal to those who charge themselves with the disagreeable duty. As the prosecutor of one of these prints, you will have to suffer a thousandfold more indignities than by allowing them an occasional fling at you.—I recommend you to compound for the lesser evil. A character, such as yours, my dear sir, a name which sheds lustre on the man who bears it, a renown for integrity and worth such as few noblemen but would barter their coronets to obtain, may well enable you to hear a few idle twittings concerning your connection with Lombard Street.”

At this exposition, Mr. Hamlyn, as in gratitude bound, extended his hand to his solicitor, and a squeeze of becoming fervour and duration was exchanged between them; al-

though the banker was every way entitled to a prodigality of praise measured out to him, per Lincoln's Inn tariff, at a ratio of thirteen and fourpence per fudge.

A far more interesting subject, meanwhile, was beginning to occupy, for his behoof, the attention of his legal delegate. The solicitors of the Marchioness of Dartford had forwarded to them, immediately after the formal betrothment of the young couple, a *précis* of the liberal intentions of the young bridegroom; and it was, of course, more agreeable to examine, with Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, a schedule of the splendid and unencumbered Dartford property, than to grope in the mysteries of the newspaper press.

On all sides, the matrimonial plot was thickening. The noble invalid from Dartford Hall arrived in town, to make the acquaintance of her future daughter-in-law; while Colonel Hamilton was hourly expected at Fenton's with *his*, to become an eyewitness of the general happiness. All was mirth, and promise of mirth, in Cavendish Square.

There was some difficulty in recognizing, under its present brilliant and aristocratic aspect, the sober dulness which, for so many years, had enveloped the methodical household of Hamlyn the banker!

CHAPTER II.

It were better to meet some dangers half-way, though they come nothing near, than to keep too long a watch upon their approaches ; for if a man watch too long, it is odds he will fall asleep.

BACON.

“ I hope and trust my young friend the Marquis won't be jealous, my dear, when he hears that your mother, (who stopped the carriage just now to welcome me to Lon'on, at the corner of Holles Street,) told me I should find you alone, and gave me warrant for a *tête-à-tête* ? ”

“ Gerald is very indulgent at present,” replied Miss Hamlyn, with a smile. “ These are courtship days, you know !—I will not promise you, dearest Colonel Hamilton, that

he will allow me to tell you a year hence, how truly glad I am to be again sitting by your side!"—

"I must try and keep him in good humour with me, by some more Lion-hunts!"—said the Colonel, laughing. "As you say, these are courtship-days; and I couldn't help feeling glad, my dear, when I heard they were to be spun out a bit, by making you wait for the wedding! For even in the happiest marriages, wedlock has as many thorns as courtship roses."

"Are you trying to cast a gloom upon my bright prospects?"—

"Rather, my dear Lydia, to put you into conceit with the old Marchioness's whimsicality."

"I assure you that among the many kind things Lady Dartford has done towards me," she replied, "her postponement of our wedding has been the kindest. Gerald and I are allowed to see each other daily; and I do not mind saying to *you*, who so dearly love and appreciate my best of mothers, that I

should not have been happy to leave her here alone, till Harry is established at home to keep her company. My sister will be two years longer in the school-room ; and my father's time, between the banking-house in the morning and House of Commons at night, is so thoroughly taken up, that I fear dear mamma would miss me, unless Harry were at hand to take my place."

" Why, to say the truth, I fancied just now that Mrs. Hamlyn looked a little paler and thinner than usual. Though she said a thousand fine things about her new son-in-law, I fancied I saw tears in her eyes !"—

" Not on *our* account,—for I can assure you that she is beginning to love Lord Dartford as if he were a child of her own ! And so she ought, for it is impossible to be more dutifully attached than he is to mamma. But I fear she is uneasy about Harry."

" What the deuce !—the senior wrangler has not been turning restiff again, has he ? —not been bitten anew, with the banker-phobia, I hope ?"—

“ Poor mamma fancies he is ill and unhappy, because he has written to prepare her for being deeply mortified at the result of his approaching examination.”

“ Why ’t isn’t *that* frets her, I hope?— Surely a woman surrounded with every earthly blessing, can afford to dispense with a few cheers in the Cambridge Senate House, for one of her sons ?”—

“ Not when their absence is a proof of his spirit being broken, as in the present instance. With Henry’s brilliant abilities, it is impossible not to attribute the sudden change in his college standing, to the disgusts by which his mind is overpowered. However, it is useless to talk of it ! My father’s will is as that of the Medes and Persians, and the less said about it the better ! So talk to me about Mrs. Hamilton,—talk to me about *Ellen* !—Why didn’t you bring her with you to-day ?”

“ She has caught a sad cold on the railway,—the cold of an opera-singer, in my private conviction. I’ve a notion, my dear, that

the poor girl is particularly tenacious of forms and ceremonies as regards your family ; from whom she formerly received a bit of a slight. Unless I'm much mistaken, Ellen will not set foot in Cavendish Square, till you've some of ye been to say, ' How d'ye do ' to her, at our Hotel in St. James's Street."

" *That* may be very easily managed !" cried Lydia, laughing. " As soon as mamma comes home, we will drive straight to Fenton's. — But I hope Mrs. Hamilton is not a formal person ? — It is my hope that we may see very much of each other ; and — "

" Thank ye, thank ye, my dear ! — She won't be formal with *you*, Lydia. She's prepared to love you with all her might and main. And what's more, she's very fond of your handsome young Marquis, my dear, — ' Gerald ' as you've the sauciness to call him. She was quite sorry when he left Dean Park ! For he often walked over to the Manor ; and used to amuse Ellen for hours, rhodomonta-

ding about *you*;—how much better you talked and walked, rode, drove a pony-chaise, shot at a mark, played billiards, and did all sorts of tomboy things, that would shock Miss Creswell to hear of,—than any other charmer of his acquaintance!—Nay, don't look so angry! He didn't accuse you, perhaps, of *quite* all these accomplishments. But he said that one of your great charms consisted in not being missish;—in speaking your mind frankly, and enjoying life cordially;—not like a wax doll stuffed with bran, after the fashion of half the young ladies or ladyships of his acquaintance."

"And pray is his account of Mrs. Hamilton equally to be relied on?" cried Lydia, much amused. "For he pronounces her the most beautiful woman in England;—in proof of which he asserts that Alberic Vernon, of woman-hating renown, has fallen desperately in love with her."

"I hope he'd the grace to tell you, at the same time, that the passion is any thing but mutual?—He and I used to amuse ourselves

for hours, watching Master Alberic making the agreeable, and she, snubbing him every moment, as if he cost nothing ; while your brother Watty, who has a mighty leaning towards these Vernons, used to look as if he were sitting on hot iron, for fear the young spark should take offence at Ellen's plain-speaking."

" I think Walter *has* rather a partiality for the *Hyde* !"—said Lydia, gravely.

" Lord Dartford used to swear he was in love with that pretty die-away damsel of a daughter. So I don't suppose he'll be *particularly* pleased at hearing what has happened since he and the Marquis left Dean Park."

" To Miss Vernon ?"—

" No, to her popinjay of a brother ! After all, he's perpetually saying against matrimony, the coxcomb actually popped the question to Nelly ! To be sure, she didn't give him an opportunity to make quite as great an ass of himself as I could have wished ; for she desired *me* to convey to

him as decided a negative as one could well express without knocking him down. So I lost all the fun I'd promised myself in a long courtship, which I knew would end with having to bow him out at last."

"What! not tempted by that fine old place?—Why I don't think that *I*, dearly as I love Gerald, could have withstood the Holbein Gallery and golden grove of oaks at the Hyde!" cried Lydia.—"Seriously, however, dear Colonel Hamilton!—what consternation must it have caused in the Vernon family, to hear of their unparalleled son and heir being rejected by a person so unconnected with the peerage!"—

"I know only one thing that would have created *greater* consternation, my dear,—*i. e.* her accepting him!—Bless your soul, that man and woman in armour,—his father and mother,—would have died no other death than seeing Alberic the Great united with a commoner's widow!—There would have had to be as fine a funeral at Braxham Church, as I hope there'll be a wedding at

Ovington, come next June!—By the way, my dear, it would have done your heart good to see how proud the worthy Doctor was when your letter arrived, apprising him of your marriage, and asking him to perform the ceremony, which was just like one of yours and your mother's kind and pretty thoughts!—For, you see, Markham fancied that your father, being up to his ears in dignitaries of the Church, would be wanting a Bishop at least, for the grandeur of the thing.”—

“ On the contrary,—but for my respect for Dr. Markham,—Lord Dartford's tutor, old Mr. Buckingham, would have been the man.”

“ Well! some of these days, my dear, you must find a good living for Markham, in your lord's list of preferment!—He wants it, I suspect, poor fellow!—for there's another little olive-branch coming some time this spring!—One could almost fancy there was some especial grace in parsonage-houses, to favour their sprouting! I'm to be god-

father, I'd have you to know ; and I shall be having Lord Dartford next asking me to be bridesman ! Poor Jack is every body's odd man,—every body's dirty dog !—But good-bye, good-bye, my dear ! I've promised to be home by three, to beau Ellen to the Panorama of Naples. — She's always hankering after Italy,—foolish girl !” —

“ And is not afraid, it seems, of increasing her cold by a visit to Leicester Fields !” —

“ Ah !—Well !—I see I've let the cat out of the bag !—Never mind !—*You* will know how to make allowances for her, my dear Lydia, and persuade your mother to be prompt in giving us a call.”

But there was no further need of the suggestion. In the course of the day, Colonel Hamilton, (who, living in a circle composed of persons mutually interested in each other's affairs, was apt to repeat all that he heard,) related to Ellen, after describing the great happiness of Lydia, the uneasiness entertained by her mother on Henry's account. Having at that moment wholly

forgotten the Trinity letter and Whitehall encounter, it did not occur to him that his lovely companion was peculiarly interested in knowing that, so far from turning out first man of his year, Henry Hamlyn was likely to prove a failure, so thoroughly was his spirit damped by having been *forced* by his father into a career the most distasteful to his feelings;—and Colonel Hamilton having expressed himself with all his usual warmth concerning the disappointment experienced on the occasion by his excellent mother, Ellen instantly made up her mind to volunteer a visit with him to Cavendish Square, the following day.

In the interim, however, even this project was forestalled. Mrs. Hamlyn wrote to request that the Colonel and Mrs. Hamilton would accompany her to her box at the Opera, which was a double one; and Ellen, who a few hours before would certainly have declined the invitation, hastened to comply.—She felt bound to abstain from all ungracious dealing towards one for whom she

had been the innocent cause of so cruel a disappointment.

Harassed as Richard Hamlyn was at this juncture by the unspoken menaces of Spilsby, and his deep regret at having afforded to a person so nearly connected with his noble son-in-law as Lord Crawley, the remotest clue to his anxiety to disencumber his banking-house of one of its confidential servants, it would have afforded him some comfort, could he have surmised the degree of mortification unintentionally inflicted that night by his wife, upon the obnoxious family of Vernon!

In selecting an Opera-box for her, his choice had been solely dictated by his determination that it should be within view of Lady Vernon's; in order that the haughty ladies of the Hyde might learn by ocular demonstration that, however insolently they might rise in Warwickshire above the banker's family, in London, the acquaintanceships of Mrs. Hamlyn were pretty nearly their own; and from the commencement of the season, it was consequently wormwood to

Lucinda to see the Marquis,—*her* Marquis, — seated by the side of the lovely and elegantly-dressed Lydia, whom a few months before she had treated as an insignificant school-girl; more especially as, whenever Mrs. Hamlyn felt too much out of spirits to attend the opera, Lady Rotherwood officiated as chaperon to the future Marchioness, and, within view of the Vernons, treated her future niece with all the affection of a mother, and far more than the consideration she had ever testified towards any inmate of the Hyde!—Lord Vernon resented it, of course, as a new injury on the part of Providence, that the lessee of her Majesty's Theatre should have presumed to let one of the boxes within four of his own, to such people as the family of Hamlyn the banker. But there was no remedy! Either Lucinda and her mother must renounce the enjoyment of the opera, or find all their delight in Grisi and Rubini embittered by this infamous misappropriation of the Marquis of Dartford, and
Box 27!

But on the night in question, an aggravation of evil was in store for them. On their way to their box, Lady Vernon had claimed the arm of the Duc de Montmorency, one of the diplomatic *attachés*; a person whom, in the absence of a promising match as the attendant of her daughter, she regarded as an ornament and addition to her box; and, as the Duke was too well-bred to take an immediate leave of the lady who honoured him by so pointed a preference, he sat down patiently to be flirted with and smiled upon by Lucinda.

Scarcely, however, had he been five minutes seated, when his double glasses were levelled steadily at the seat usually occupied by the Hamlyns; and, unwilling to provoke the observations certain to be made by a dozen different visitors, every opera-night, touching the great good fortune of Lord Dartford and the striking beauty of his intended bride, Miss Vernon took no notice of the pre-occupation of her companion.

But persons of the Duc de Montmorency's

nation seldom keep their impressions to themselves. His admiration soon burst forth in exclamations of "*charmante !*"—" *divinement belle !*"—" *un port de déesse !*"—" *une taille de nymphe !*"—

"She is very pretty, certainly ; and how admirably Persiani is singing to-night," observed Lucinda, in hopes of moderating his enthusiasm.

"Admirably !—But who is this lovely neighbour of yours ?"

"The daughter of a banker, a person of whom you are never likely to have heard."

"*You* are speaking of Miss Hamlyn, the beautiful creature the Marquis of Dartford is to marry," said the Duke eagerly. "I have seen *her* hundreds of times, and been enchanted as often. In my opinion, she is nearly the prettiest, and quite the best dressed girl in town. But the lady I am admiring is a thousand times more beautiful. *Juste ciel !* If *such* a woman were to appear at our opera in Paris, not an eye in the house but would be fixed upon her box !—*Elle ferait*

fureur!—But nothing makes a sensation in London! In London, it is scarcely worth while to be a beauty, or a comet, or a cat with six legs. You chilly *insulaire*s would scarcely be at the trouble of an interjection, were Cleopatra herself to arrive sailing in her galley on the Thames.—And, by the way, yonder lovely being gives one rather the idea of Cleopatra!”—

Lucinda Vernon, afraid, perhaps, of being classed among her uninterjectional country people, now affected some interest in the subject; and, instead of being satisfied with her own *lorgnon*, borrowed the huge Parisian ivory double barrels of the Duke, to examine the new beauty.

“She is, indeed, wonderfully handsome!” was her irrepressible exclamation. “Look, mamma!—the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life.”—

“A fine woman, certainly,” responded Lady Vernon in her turn; “doubtless some vulgar city connexion of the Hamlyns!”—

“City connexion, perhaps, but not vulgar,”

was the Duke's remonstrance ; and in another minute, as if unable to restrain his curiosity concerning her, he rose, and was about to leave them, when the boxkeeper's key grated in the lock, and Alberic made his appearance.

“ I dare say my brother can inform us who she is ! ” — said Miss Vernon, eager to detain him. “ He knows the people she is with. — Alberic ! — *who* is the lady with Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter to-night ? ” —

Alberic Vernon, who had come straight from his cab to his mother's box from a holy horror of *committing* himself by promiscuous lounging in the boxes of other ladies, protested that he had not yet had time to look round the house ; but, after a fussy adjustment of his glasses, as though for the discovery of a planet, and regardless (in order to satisfy the curiosity of a man so fashionable as Montmorency) of his usual terror of placing himself prominently forward in his family-box, — leant over the head of his sister to examine the contents of “ the menagerie of Hamlyn the banker.”

To have encountered the eyes of a basilisk would not have produced a more electrical effect upon his nerves. Instantly receding into his place, instantly withdrawing his glasses, and losing all colour from his cheeks, and all assurance from his address, he began to stammer forth remarks upon the new ballet. But the Duke was not to be thus distanced, and renewed his inquiries.—“*Who* was the lady?”

“A widow,” was Alberic’s hurried reply; “a woman you have probably never met, and are never likely to meet in society.”

And again he fastened upon the ballet; but Montmorency persisted in inquiring the name of the lady he was never destined to meet in society.

“Hamilton!”

“Ha! a very good name—an historical name. The English name of all others best known on the continent,” cried Montmorency. Your Scottish Duke of Hamilton is the representative of one of our French duchies.”

“But this person has nothing to do with

our Scottish Duke of Hamilton," cried Lady Vernon, vexed beyond her patience.—"You are probably unaware that the names of the great Scotch families extend to all the retainers of their clan; and there is no more connexion between these vassals and the head of their house than there would be between your coachman and you, were it the custom of your great French houses to give *their* patronymic to their servants."

"I am quite aware of it!" cried the Duke. "But, while contemplating yonder beautiful creature, I am inclined to parody the observation of your famous comedian, and say, 'If God writes a legible hand, that woman is a lady!'"

"She shall be an empress, if you like!" pettishly rejoined Lucinda; "but I can assure you that she is a person we should very reluctantly admit into our society."

Montmorency, too well-bred a man to gainsay the dictum of so fair a lady, uttered some common-place remark concerning the ballet, by way of changing the conversation;

and unluckily addressed his sally to Alberic Vernon, who, with his natural susceptibility of egotism of a Frenchified prig, concluded that his secret was known, and the Duke talking *at* him.

“The lady is cruel, I see!” said Montmorency, adverting to the gorgeous Baron in front of the stage, who had just flung himself at the feet of Cerito. “The Herr Baron yonder is too great a barbarian to perceive that it requires something besides his empty grandeur to subdue the heart of a pretty woman. I *hate* a fellow who makes love on the strength of his sixteen quarterings!—So apparently does our bellissima ballerina.”

Before Mr. Vernon could rouse himself from the shock of what he considered a stroke of persiflage, Montmorency had left the box in search of some friend of Dartford's, who would perhaps put him in the way of a presentation to the beautiful friend of the Hamlyns; and no sooner was he gone, than Lucinda and her mother burst into exclamations of wonder at the want of tact exhibited by

foreigners in detecting the characteristics of high and low in English society.

“I should really have thought that a Montmorency,—a member of the family of the first baronial family in Christendom,—might know better than throw away his admiration on the vulgar widow of a son of that upstart Colonel Hamilton !” said Lady Vernon, swelling with ruffled majesty, and fanning herself with such fervour of indignation, that Alberic entertained little doubt the news of his unhappy passion had already reached his family. His only hope was that,—thanks to the lady-like discretion of its charming object,—tidings of his rash declaration and immediate rejection might be somewhat longer on the road.

Still, though he would willingly have condemned poor Ellen Hamilton to be thrown into the caldron of boiling oil in which the Jewess of Constance was made to atone for the brightness of her eyes, he thought proper to vindicate his choice by the force of lordly example.

“You were wrong to say that Mrs. Ha-

milton was a woman you should be sorry to associate with, Inda !” said he, addressing his sister ; “ for nothing is more likely than that you will have her next winter at Ormeau, to which place you seem bent upon despatching an olive-branch.”

“ At Ormeau ?—Yes ! I remember now that the Hamiltons had worked themselves into an acquaintance with the Duke of Elvaston before we left the country !” said Lady Vernon, unable to avoid, without retreating into the back of her box, the vexatious spectacle of the Duc de Montmorency presented in form to Mrs. Hamilton and Lydia Hamlyn by the Marquis of Dartford.

“ And *since* you left the country, they have spent a fortnight there to so much purpose, that Lord Edward Sutton is wild to marry Colonel Hamilton’s daughter-in-law, and his family equally eager to promote the match.”

“ Lord Edward Sutton ?—What *can* he mean by debasing himself in such a way ? Why, he inherits the Wrottesley property, and is in possession of six or seven thousand

a-year!—Lord Edward can afford to marry whom he pleases!”

“The reason, I suppose, that he wishes to marry Mrs. Hamilton.”

“I can understand,” continued his mother, not heeding his interruption, “that a young man in the situation of Captain Hamlyn, who has no pretension to connexion, and only just enough money to wish for more, might be tempted by Colonel Hamilton’s fifteen or twenty thousand a-year (what has he?) to make up to his daughter-in-law.—A very suitable match on both sides! But for a man of family and fortune like Lord Edward Sutton—it is really disgusting!—I should just as soon expect, Alberic, to hear her talked of for *you*!”—

This was said wholly without design; for Lady Vernon was precisely the sort of woman whom a gossip must be endued with more courage than usually falls to the lot of that sneaking tribe, to accost with intelligence at the degradation of her son. Barlow of Alderham, the only man aware of what had

been going on between the Hyde and Burlington Manor, no more dared advert to the subject in his letters to Grosvenor Place, than lay a sacrilegious finger upon the monuments in Braxham church ! But young Vernon, accustomed to hear the sparring of innuendo systematically carried on between his father and mother, (who were apt, like the populace of Rome during the Carnival, to knock each other down with flints formed into the semblance of sugarplums !) had little doubt that he was being flogged over the shoulders of Lord Edward Sutton.

While this uneasy family were studying how to convert even the pleasures of life into pains, and engrafting hyssop on the rose, the inmates of Mrs. Hamlyn's box were enjoying one of those pleasant evenings which arise for people of well-regulated minds from the elements of amusement around them,—agreeable friends, fine music, exquisite dancing, and a succession of fair faces lining the *salle de spectacle* for the recreation of their eyes during the intervals of the performance.—The

musical taste of Mrs. Hamilton, which was not only of the highest order, but refined by three years' residence and instruction in Italy, enabled her to appreciate the high merits of a company which, after the London fashion, the casual visitors to the box made it a point to decry and disparage, though certain to revert to it five years afterwards, when no longer attainable, as the finest in the world. Those well-known airs of the Lucia were to *her* ears familiar and precious as some rich shrine to the eyes of a votary ; nor did the plaintive character of the music lose by the companionship of those with whom she found herself in association.

While, in the eyes of Lydia, whose heart was softened by the perfect and unalloyed happiness of her situation between the mother of her veneration and the lover of her choice, this beautiful stranger derived the highest interest from her relationship to their excellent friend the Colonel, Ellen could not forbear regarding Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughter in the light of a sister and mother lost to her

for ever ! All she had heard from Henry of the womanly excellencies of the former, — all she saw in the face of the latter to remind her of the intelligent beauty, the frank cordiality of the object of her affection,—imparted new interest in her heart to the kindness with which she was welcomed by both. She felt herself, in short, to be one of the family ; and even Colonel Hamilton, though tolerably accustomed now to the effect of her rare beauty, was struck by the exquisite expression imparted by the awakened sensibilities of her heart to one of the finest faces in the world.

While he sat conversing between the acts with Mrs. Hamlyn, the Marquis was engaged in eliciting from Ellen instructions for his meditated bridal tour.

“ Admit that I am every way the luckiest of the human race, my dear Mrs. Hamilton !” said he. “ In these times, when every body has seen every thing, and half the angelic beings in London are as *blasé* in the pleasures of life as old gentlemen of fifty, to have found a little wife who knows no more of the

world than I do myself,—who is just as vulgarly delighted as I am with a good opera,—and just as enthusiastic in her desire to see something more of valley and mountain in the way of landscape, than old England!—Sensible people, like your friends the Cossingtons,—or fashionable people, like *my* friends the Vernons,—would, I dare say, despise us as a couple of silly children, whose rawness and newness are something unaccountable. But I assure you that, if there be one thing more than another for which I am obliged to my friend, Mr. Hamlyn, it is for having secured me pretty nearly the only wife with whom I could commence, hand in hand, my experience of the pleasures of life. So you see that, if we are children together, we shall be very happy ones!—Indeed, I am beginning to think that we two and Colonel Hamilton are the *only* children left in the world!”

Miss Hamlyn interrupted him to entreat Mrs. Hamilton’s indulgence towards his egotism.

“I beg to say that I do *not* apologize!”

persisted the young lover, fixing his eyes admiringly on the lovely face that borrowed new charms from the blushes by which it was now overspread. “ I look upon Mrs. Hamilton, my dear Lydia, as one of the family ; and shall be only too happy to listen when she favours *me*, in return for my selfish confessions, with sisterly confidences of a similar nature.”

Though this was said at random, and with reference to Colonel Hamilton’s avowed projects in favour of Walter, rather than to Henry, with whom at present Lord Dartford had little acquaintance, it sufficed to alarm the womanly dignity of Ellen Hamilton ; and her countenance forthwith assumed that quiet gravity which so well became its chaste but somewhat severe expression.

It was at this pause in the conversation that the door of the box was opened to admit Captain Hamlyn and the Duc de Montmorency, who had applied to Walter to present him to his family ; and Dartford, who, with all his dispositions to be brotherly, had not

quite forgotten his friend's avowals of contempt for the rusticity and want of refinement of Colonel Hamilton's daughter-in-law, could scarcely repress a smile at the deferential manner in which he was already beginning to address the lady whom he found to be an object of adoration to Dukes and the sons of Dukes.

It is true that the Marquis, prevented by his advantages of birth from appreciating the influence of mere rank upon certain dispositions, attributed the altered manner of Walter Hamlyn to the growing ascendancy of Ellen Hamilton's beauty over his feelings ; and took an opportunity to whisper to Lydia, when the others were engaged in conversation, that he suspected his friend Sutton would have to run a neck-and-neck race with his friend Walter, for the hand of the " beautiful Ellen."

Too slavishly fashionable, meanwhile, was the Captain, to be seen in his mother's opera-box longer than the time necessary for the presentation of his diplomatic friend ! Intending to return, towards the close of the

ballet, and offer his arm to Mrs. Hamilton through the crush-room to the carriage, while his mother was escorted by the Colonel and his sister by her affianced lover, he proceeded on a short visit to the Vernons; justly calculating that the fair Lucinda would scarcely exhibit her usual hauteur towards him, with Dartford and Montmorency engaged before her eyes in the most courteous homage to his family. Nor was he deceived in his hopes of a gracious reception. Miss Vernon and her mother were not popular. Lucinda, being one of those heartless London girls who, while engaged in pursuit of a particular object, are indiscreet enough to disregard all others, and care little whose feelings they wound, found herself, when thrown out in her Marquis-chase, alone in her glory,—without a single suitor,—without a single admirer. She had avowedly pitched her ambitions so high, that men of moderate pretensions were afraid to give way to any dawning feelings of preference.

It was consequently a relief when the

fashionable Captain Hamlyn presented himself to occupy the place vacated by the recreant duke ; affording the certainty of an attendant to call up the carriage. To detain their visitor, with this selfish view, Lucinda accordingly exerted herself to “ look and talk delightfully with all her might ;” and her smiles and bonmots were as brilliant and fascinating as if they had been ordered, new, bright, and shining, from some jeweller in Pall Mall.

The consequence was, that Walter remained enchanted in his chair, during nearly the last act of the ballet ; nor was it till a prodigious rustling of satin cloaks and fluttering of swansdown, in an opposite box, apprized him, by the departure of a royal party, that the evening's entertainments were drawing to a close, that he suddenly replaced in their morocco case the huge glasses with which opera-goers are now condemned by the force of fashion to encumber themselves, though they would be voted heavy baggage by a retreating army. Lady Vernon and her daughter had

the mortification to perceive by the farewell nature of his bow in quitting the box, that they had nothing to hope from his assistance in steering through the crush-room!

But, alas! scarcely had Walter reached the box which bore the name of Mrs. Hamlyn inscribed on the blue label over the door, when he saw, winding along the lobby before him, its departing inmates, — Mrs. Hamilton leaning on the arm of Lord Edward Sutton! — All he could see of her was the rich Indian shawl which enveloped her fine shoulders; and the diamond comb presented to her that morning by her father-in-law, sparkling among the raven-braids that encircled her classically-formed head.

While the family of the banker occupied this prominent and brilliant position in the eyes of the fashionable world, the fountain-head of their pomps and vanities was sorely troubled. Richard Hamlyn had dined that day at the Bankers' Club; enjoying to a degree appreciable only by hollow, worldly natures, the congratulations of his brother

bankers on the approaching marriage in his family.

Some few, who had lived in the professional interchange of services with him, shook him heartily by the hand,—sincerely rejoicing in an event likely to increase his domestic happiness by that of his daughter. Others,—the *equus aurati*, or new fangled baronets of the order of the Golden Calf, who looked upon financial opulence only as a bridge of ingots, whereby to crawl into the ranks of the aristocracy,—expressed, by more deferential salutations, their delight at an alliance ennobling the whole bankerhood of Great Britain.—One or two, of genuinely philosophical views, were moderate in their congratulations on a marriage which they regarded, like all other disproportions, as a source of social disorder; while Sir Benjamin Bondwell, and certain of his confraternity, who contemplated with a jealous eye the advancement of the Hamlyns, their pretensions to the notice of royalty and fashionable notoriety, seized upon the occasion for launching against

him, under the guise of compliments, a thousand covert-sneers on his

showing dolphin-like above
The element he lived in.

All that a very vulgar-minded man could string together in allusion to coronet-coaches stopped in Newgate Market on their way to call in Lombard Street, or to the Goldsmiths' Company walking in peers' robes at the Coronation, was levelled at poor Hamlyn; who, like some novice exposed for the first time to the unmerciful roasting of a dinner at the Steaks,—had only to smile,—take all in good part,—and exercise his utmost ingenuity to restore the conversation to its usual channel. It was a relief indeed to his soreness when he found himself overlooked, and his companions engrossed by the consideration of politics, in a light how different from that in which *he* was forced to view them as a Warwickshire squire! Like a certain rich Jew, who in appreciating a matchless goblet from the hand of Cellini, estimated the metal, per ounce, at melting price,—parliamentary

eloquence was rated at so much a scruple ;— wars, and rumours of wars were talked of according to their influence on the money-market ;— a massacre was described at its price current ;— and an inundation deplored, according to its fall in consols !—

At length, when such of his brethren as were neither involved in parliament nor connected with the more attractive clubs of the Carlton quarter, sat down to finish the evening at whist, battling for half-crown points with as much waste of cogitation and earnestness as had enabled them in the course of the morning to net thousands by a successful stroke of speculation, Richard Hamlyn hurried away to the House. There had been a time when almost the only social pleasure he really enjoyed consisted in those club-meetings. It was *his* House of Peers,— *his* Herald's' College. *There* was the name of his forefathers had in remembrance. *There* still lingered two or three grave, gray-headed men, who had begun life as the bosom-friends of Walter Hamlyn ; and still kept among their

sacred family relics the mourning-rings they had worn on his decease.

But now, the society of these men was becoming hateful to Him of Dean Park; not because he felt elevated by his new connections above their level, but because, by his recent policy, he had sunk immeasurably below it. He trembled at the idea that rumours might transpire,—not indeed of the fearful nature likely to be set afloat by the intermeddling of Spilsby,—but of the course he had pledged himself to pursue in parliament, on a question of financial policy deeply involving the interests of his moneyed colleagues;—his systematic protection of which had for years assigned him immense importance in their eyes.

The discovery *must* come! He knew that, in the course of a few weeks, he should be pointed out among them as having sold them to government for thirty pieces of silver; though the express mintage of those pieces and alloy of that silver, they were as yet unprepared to point out. But he dreaded the first indications of the coming storm. He shrunk

from the exposure of the political baseness into which he had been betrayed by the latent terrors arising from still deeper turpitude. While undergoing the coarse bantering of old Bondwell, he dreaded every moment lest the uncompromising Sir Benjamin should assail him by the name of Judas ; for a remote allusion to his filthy bargain with government would have wounded him deeper than the direct accusation of tuft-hunting.

Getting hastily into the carriage, he proceeded to the House of Commons ;—conscious, however, that even that dignified retreat would shortly become less consolatory to his feelings ; and that the conciliations of the Treasury Bench would offer poor compensation for the general respect hitherto commanded by his altitude of parliamentary independence.

Still, the tale of his apostacy was unbruited ; and he accordingly brushed past the humpbacked Quasimodo of the house, and ascended the shabbiest and dirtiest staircase in the metropolis, with his usual con-

sciousness of the dignity attached to every component item of the first body-corporate in enlightened Europe.—And, by the way, Richard Hamlyn having now been twenty years in parliament, had not only progressed into the dignity of an old member, but, by the changes of the times, come to find himself remarkable for the spruceness, the utmost dandyism of his dress, compared with the less Londonized throng of his compeers of the Reformed House of Commons.

After spending an hour in the House, in a whispered colloquy over the shoulder of Lord Crawley, (which, if the truth must be told, bore little reference to the very long-winded and laboured speech with which an honourable opposition member was favouring his constituents north of the Tweed, through the wearied ears of the Reporter's gallery,—one of those dreary parliamentary passages that lead to nothing,)—the banker finding there was to be no division, returned to Cavendish Square;—attributing something of the charm just then to the name of home, which every man of

business connects with the leisure he has only enjoyed for five hasty minutes, since the hour of an early breakfast.

His family was not yet returned from the opera ; and Ramsay, as he hurried before his master into the study to light the lamp, took occasion to mention that “ a person had called twice in the course of the evening, requesting to see Mr. Hamlyn.”

“ Did not the gentleman leave his name ?” inquired the banker, who was seldom molested at his private residence by the intrusion of “ persons,” unless now and then a Barsthorpe constituent, who could not be made to understand that, in London, business hours conclude with the first stroke of the dinner-bell.

“ The first time he came, sir, he left no name, but merely said he would call again, as we rather expected you home early,” replied Ramsay,—proceeding as leisurely with his task of removing and replacing the globe of the Carcel lamp as if the enlightenment of the universe depended upon the evenness of its wick and steadiness of its light !—“ The se-

cond time, sir, as he seemed so *very* persevering and determined, in making his inquiries of John as to where you had dined, and whether you were likely to be met with at the House to-night, I came to the door myself; and unless I am mistaken, sir, it was one of the banking-clerks from Lombard Street."

"A bald-headed man?"—inquired Hamlyn, in a low voice, and with assumed unconcern.

"He had his hat on, sir,—I really can't take upon me to say. But now I think of it, John told me he had written his name."

"Where is John?—Send him hither."

"The footmen are gone with the carriage to fetch my mistress from the opera," replied Ramsay; and as he replaced the Carcel on the study-table, its light fell direct upon an open blotting-book, beside the bronze standish, where lay a strip of paper, evidently deposited by John, before he proceeded to his duties of the evening.

It scarcely needed for Mr. Hamlyn to cast his eyes upon the name subscribed in good clerkly text, with due regard to the open

looping of the Ys and curling of the Ss to learn that his untimely and unfortunate visitor was no other than—SPILSBY!—

But what could be the meaning of this unauthorised intrusion into his private residence?—A short time before, and Richard Hamlyn would sooner have expected Birnam Wood to come to Dunsinane, or the Monument on Fish Street Hill to pay a morning visit to the Duke of York's Column, as for any member of his Lombard Street establishment to make his appearance, on business of his own devising, at his private residence; the consecrated groves of Dodona being less sacred in the sight of the priesthood of Apollo, than in theirs, the scaly-barked plane-trees of Cavendish Square.

But, alas! Richard Hamlyn was not unprepared for so singular an infraction of subordination on the part of his head-clerk. The countenance of Spilsby was a book in which he was beginning to read strange things, as distinctly as though its characters were as legibly inscribed as the raised letter-press invented

for the use of the blind; and from the day his daughter's marriage was publicly announced, the banker had deciphered in the eyes of his rebellious Vizier a determination to turn to account the peculiar situation of his Sultan. The higher, in short, the position attained by Hamlyn, the greater the power of the man who was able to precipitate him from his high estate into an abyss of infamy.

From the apex of his present prosperity, having a daughter about to form an alliance with one of the first nobles in the realm,—a son distinguished by the general favour of society, and occupying a commission in one of the first regiments,—another on the eve of attaining the highest academic honours preparatory to assuming his place in that house of business, to maintain the credit of which, his father had attempted such terrible sacrifices,—from the eminence of all this, to be precipitated into the dust, would be, indeed, a bitter reverse!—The consequence was, that for every step of worldly progress effected by the banker, he fancied he could discern in the

menacing looks of his enemy an additional unit augmenting the appraisal of his silence.

For a week past, the clerk had exhibited symptoms of desiring a private interview with his master; and it was with agony of spirit scarcely describable, that Hamlyn had watched him making his exits and entrances; expecting nothing less, every time he made his appearance in the private room, than an explanation, than which death itself would have been more welcome, if death could have ensued without withdrawing the curtain from the disgraceful position of his affairs.

So certain, however, did he now feel of a forthcoming crisis, that instead of indulging in his usual prayer for a respite,—for time,—for the delay of a few years,—in the hope that the fruition of some of his numerous schemes or a considerable bequest from Colonel Hamilton might enable him to fill up certain deficiencies in his accounts, the consciousness of which “appalled his spirit like a night-shriek,”—he satisfied himself with murmuring,

between his grinding teeth, in the watches of the night,—“but a few *months*!—Only let it be delayed a few months,—till Lydia’s marriage shall have been solemnized, and a shelter be thus provided for the others,—and I will submit myself to the worst!—That worst would scarcely be harder to bear, than this accursed persecution!”—

CHAPTER III.

Men are but children of a larger growth.

“ Bless my soul and body ! who would ever have thought of finding *you* here, with the Vere Street clock striking the half-hour to twelve as I came past ! ” cried Colonel Hamilton, addressing Richard Hamlyn, on entering the dining-room in Cavendish Square the following morning, as the family were rising from breakfast. “ For don’t fancy I came to see *you* !—I fancied you safe in the parish of St. Sepulchre, or I wouldn’t have set foot in your house ! ”—

“ It is not often I am idling at the West-end at this hour of the day,” replied Hamlyn,

with a smile,—affecting to humour the cheerful old man's bantering. “But I have an appointment with my lawyers at twelve, and wish to take it in my way to the city.”

“Don't let *me* be any hindrance to you, then.—Get into your cab with you, and be off!” cried the Colonel, taking the offered seat beside Mrs. Hamlyn, “or we shall be having Messrs. Pounce and Parchment in a pucker, and all along; unless I'm mistaken, of the marriage settlements of a certain Miss Lydia Hamlyn, who sits there, looking as demure and unconcerned as if she had never heard the words jointure or pin-money! As soon as you're gone, I shall expound my business to your good lady; and a flagrant case of gossiping it is, as was ever whispered over a caudle-cup. By the way, however, my dear Hamlyn, as you've ten minutes on hand over your mark, to reach Norfolk Street (for I conclude the clause-spinners who made such a desperate long job of our Burlington lease are still your men?) I may as well tell you some news that reached me this morning from

our part of the world. There's a report of a bankruptcy afloat, which has made poor Ovington's hair stand on end."

At the word bankruptcy, Richard Hamlyn, who was gathering together his hat and gloves, winced unconsciously, and made a step back towards the breakfast-table.

"Jacob Durdan, they say, poor fellow, will be in the Gazette in no time. 'Malster,' I suppose, they'll call him? But that's not *our* affair! The thing is, that his farm is actually in the market; and lying, as it does, betwixt Burlington and Dean Park, like the keystone of an arch, I suppose you won't like it to slip through your fingers?—Buy it you must—either for yourself or as young Burlington's trustee."

"I am afraid *not*!"—replied Hamlyn, much surprised at the intelligence. "Durdan used to value his property at between eleven and twelve thousand pounds; and the *bonâ fide* value cannot be much less than seven."

"Then if the *bonâ fide* value's seven, to *you* 'tis worth nearer fourteen!"—persisted the Co-

lonel, "and I shall think you a deuced lucky dog if you get it at ten."

"Perhaps so ; but I fear I must be satisfied to do without it. A man in business finds it a hard matter to lay his hands on ten thousand pounds for his private purposes."

"Not when he's got an old friend at his elbow, with thirty times ten lying idle, and the grace to be thankful when an opportunity presents itself of making a portion of it useful to better men than himself."

Hamlyn felt every nerve in his frame vibrate at this critical declaration.

"Be assured, my dear sir, that you are as welcome to invest my India bonds, or any other tangible thing of mine, in land, and in your own name, as though John Hamilton were under the turf and Watty Hamlyn standing in his shoes !"—persisted the Colonel, fancying himself misunderstood.

The hand of the banker became spasmodically clasped in that of his generous friend, as Hamlyn replied :

"I feel all this as it ought to be felt ; but

Durdan's farm, at the price likely to be put upon it under such circumstances, would be a preposterous purchase!—”

“Well! I suppose you know best!” cried the Colonel. “I haven't enough of the country gentleman in me yet to know how many years purchase one ought to give for land. Only I concluded this must be a windfall; as Robson writes me word (with a basket of Wilmot's Superb, that he sent up by the rail this morning, which I can promise you would put all Covent Garden to the blush, and Gunter's shop to the back of it!) that Barlow of Alderham is nibbling already—for Lord Vernon, of course. Barlow is no great capitalist, I take it?—But 'twould really be a nice little tit-bit to tack to the skirts of the Braxham property!”

“Certainly—beyond all doubt!—And Robson tells you that Barlow has made an offer?”

“So it is supposed. But I remember Robson saying one day, as we were pottering together in the copse adjoining Durdan's, that if ever the property was in the market you'd be

sure to snap it up; and now, he writes word, the people at Ovington look upon it as already gone—so sure are they that you'll overbid Lord Vernon."

"They will prove mistaken," said Hamlyn, gravely. "I should not consider it justifiable to make the purchase."

"Then I think you'll live to repent it when 'tis too late, and you find Lord Vernon growing up like a grain of mustard-seed under your nose, with all the Barlows of Alderham roosting in his branches!—Barlow is looking out for a farm to enable that cub of a son of his to prove what deuced bad farmers, what he calls 'a country family,' can produce!"—

"However sorely tempted, I feel it my duty to forbear," still persisted the banker.

"What! when the thing takes the form of a profitable investment? Why you know very well how difficult it is, now-a-days, to get even four per cent. for money; and if Robson's estimate be correct, Durdan's farm, even at the price named, will bring five! In a month or so, I shall be having one hundred

and fifteen thousand pounds thrown upon my hands, (if Moonjee and Company are true to their engagements,) and then you'll be telling me that, instead of the six per cent. my friends at Chinderapore have hitherto secured me, I might whistle for five!—However, don't let me detain you, with my Ovington news! Go, and settle Lydia's business for her!—Go and lay down the faggots on *your* line of road, and leave Mrs. Hamlyn and me to chat about what concerns us more than dot-and-carry-one!"—

A glance which followed the direction of Colonel Hamilton's eyes at that moment exhibited to Richard Hamlyn the face of his wife, as pale as ashes,—though inclined over the plate in which she was unconsciously smashing an egg-shell with a gold egg-spoon into the aspect of a choice bit of crackled china; and in his alarm lest her agitation should betray itself injuriously to Colonel Hamilton, after his departure, which was now inevitable, he felt almost inclined to reduce *her* to the same helpless consistency. For Ham-

lyn was gradually approaching the pitch of mental irritation which is produced by a concatenation of adverse events,—by constant brooding over evil,—by terror,—by sleeplessness,—by remorse, which, like the desperation of the scorpion surrounded by flaming spirits, instigates frantic ferocity. In humbler life, excited by the coarser struggles of so harassing a situation, he would probably have become guilty of a crime!—

But he was a banker;—a man of whom calmness, serenity, plausibility, constitute a portion of the stock-in-trade. He was a banker;—a man who, so far from being “passion’s slave,” must be as steadfast in phlegmatic self-possession, as demure in demeanour. He accordingly took from his servant his well-brushed hat and steady-looking beaver gloves; and, after a benignant nod to his family, and smile to Colonel Hamilton, (the blandness of which Howard the philanthropist might have envied!) withdrew to his cabriolet,—overmastering the strife of mingled fear, shame, hatred, misery, and desperation, contending in his tortured breast.

For, alas ! there are more Laocoons to be met with unsuspected, among the haunts of daily life, than all the united galleries of Great Britain afford to our inquiring view !

Colonel Hamilton followed him to the door with his eyes, as one loves to dwell upon the aspect of a friend in the fulness of his prosperity and joy ; satisfied that if there existed a man on the face of the earth whose virtues had their reward in the attainment of perfect worldly happiness, it was that upright and self-denying individual, Hamlyn the banker !—

Even Ramsay, as he waited upon his master to the snow-white steps of his stately doorway, contemplated him with the abject deference paid by the vulgar only to great capitalists, or great lords ; and would have denounced as a slanderous libeller the wretch who presumed to espy a spot in such a sun of glory, as the church-going, rate-paying, orphan-school-presiding, propagation-of-the-gospel-subscribing, mild, virtuous, punctual, liberal, Richard Hamlyn, the banker !—

Yet this man of universal credit was but a more polished, more cautious, more solid

swindler, in the amount of thousands, where swindlers in the amount of tens or hundreds are sentenced to the hulks.

Such was the man who was proceeding into the city, overcome with dread at the idea of an impending interview with his own clerk; and while the sober, lumbering cab of the man of business was starting from the door, Colonel Hamilton proceeded to unfold the purpose of his visit, by placing in the hand of Mrs. Hamlyn a cheque for one hundred pounds, on her husband's bank.

“ You'd do me a mon'ous favour,” said he, “ by looking me out this trifle's-worth of fal-lals for a lying-in lady and her bantling, as a present for my good friend, Mrs. Markham, to whose babe I've proposed myself as godfather. I should look like an old ass, were I to present myself at one of the Bond Street frilleries, where such matters are ticketed up; and even Ellen (the more's the pity) knows nothing about caudle-cup finery; so I thought it might vex her, poor dear, if I put *her* upon executing my commission. But as I know you are going

about just now, my dear ma'am, among linen and lace shops, in order to give my lady, our young Marchioness yonder, a few rags to her back at parting, I thought, may be, you'd give yourself so much trouble on my account."

"And with the more pleasure," replied Mrs. Hamlyn, "that I have an unfeigned respect and regard for the object of your kindness. No one can better than myself appreciate all that has been effected at Ovington by the influence of her example and vigilance. The late Vicar was a widower; and though, during his incumbency, every thing was done by Dean Park for the village that we are still doing, or in fact considerably more, the poor people were not half so healthy or happy as now,—a sufficient proof that it is the care of the Markhams, and not the money we provide, which ministers to their welfare."

"Nothing can exceed the activity and thoughtfulness of that good woman," added Lydia. "Go where one will, at Ovington, or exercise what charity one may, the Vicar's wife has always been beforehand with us,—not

only with food and alms, but useful advice, far more difficult to bestow. Mrs. Markham is a very model for parsons' wives !”

“ Well, my dear, as I said t’other day, you must get Dartford to reward the virtues of the Vicarage with a fat living.”

“ On the contrary,” said Miss Hamlyn, humouring his raillery. “ It strikes me that her excellences are more appropriate to a lean one. It would be very unpatriotic in me to remove the second providence of my native Ovington !”—

“ But being thus disposed towards Mrs. Markham,” resumed the banker’s wife, “ believe me, you would please and prosper her much more by converting your gift into a more solid form. The Markhams are not well off. They have secured, I understand, a small provision for their children. But their family is increasing ; and a hundred pounds laid by on compound interest would give your godchild a couple of hundreds to help him on, if a boy, in the outset of life.”

“ By George !—I do believe you’ve caught

the money-itch of Hamlyn!"—cried the Colonel, almost vexed. "Can't I do something for a godchild, against it wants putting out in life, without denying myself the pleasure of seeing it tidy and smart, in its long clothes and cockade?"—

"Just as you please!"—replied Mrs. Hamlyn, who loved the Colonel too sincerely to be affronted by his occasional pettishnesses;—"but take a woman's word for it that Mrs. Markham has too much sense to care for lace and lawn; and that, if you wish to make this money a source of satisfaction to her, you had better let me purchase some more useful present,—plate, linen, furniture, rather than finery, which has little charm for those who have no admiring eyes to be delighted by the exhibition. Even the cap and robe that Lydia embroidered for little Kitty have not, I am sure, been taken out of the wardrobe a dozen times!"—

"I'm afraid you're right," cried the Colonel; "I wish you'd be sometimes in the wrong, if 'twas only for a change. Well,

well! go to Rundell's, and look out a sober parsonage-house-like teapot and coffeepot, and a cantine of spoons and forks.—Will that suit you?”—

“It will suit the Markhams, which signifies much more!” said Mrs. Hamlyn, good-humouredly; and while she was yet speaking, there dashed up to the door the well-appointed cab of her son Walter,—the equipage of the man of pleasure forming a singular contrast to that of the man of business, which had just rumbled off in a contrary direction.

“By George!—here's Watty himself, in the nick of time!” cried Colonel Hamilton, rising and going to the window. “He shall drive me to the silversmith's at once, and take the trouble off your hands. Lydia, my dear, what will you give me to tell you who the Captain's brought with him from the barracks?”—

This intimation of Lord Dartford's arrival sufficed to send Miss Hamlyn to the drawing-room to meet their visitor; and as the Colonel and Mrs. Hamlyn prepared to follow her

lighter footsteps, the veteran could not forbear exclaiming that, next to the pleasure of being eighteen and in love oneself, was that of witnessing so charming a juncture in so charming a person !

“ Her happiness is almost *too* great !” replied her mother, with a sigh. “ I sometimes tremble to think what would be the consequence, should any unforeseen event frustrate this hopeful marriage !—Her whole heart and soul are embarked in her present prospects.”

“ But what the deuce *should* happen to prevent it ?” cried the Colonel. “ I hear the old Marchioness is as pleased as Punch, at the idea of her son’s settling ! As to him, if Lydia’s a wee bit in love, Lord Dartford’s a better specimen of a Romeo than I fancied was left upon this lukewarm globe.”

“ It is true,” replied Mrs. Hamlyn. “ But one cannot account for one’s presentiments ; and mine hang all the heavier on my heart that I love this warm-hearted, noble-minded boy, as if he were a child of my own. I never could have expected to obtain from a

son-in-law the dutiful affection with which Lydia has already inspired Lord Dartford towards her mother. I feel that to number him among my children in my prayers to Heaven, would be an addition to the happiness of my life."

"*Will* be,—say *will* be,—my dear ma'am! There's no *would* in the case," cried Colonel Hamilton. "I hate what nervous folks pretend to call 'presentiments.' What are they but a mistrusting of Providence! Lydia *will* be happy with her husband and *you* with your son-in-law; and then you'll feel ashamed of having allowed yourself to glance at your bright sunshiny prospects in life, through the medium of a black crape veil!—So come along into the drawing-room, and let me hear whether Walter will have any thing to say to me.—If we should happen to meet some of his smart brother officers, you know, he can say, I'm a quizzical old uncle from the north, from whom he has expectations."

And chuckling at his own joke against himself, the Colonel hobbled into the drawing-

room, and, much in the same terms, made his proposition to Walter Hamlyn.

“There’s no fine folks astir yet, Watty, my boy !” said he. “What if you were to take me as far as Ludgate Hill, to choose some plate?—If I haven’t the benefit of better taste than my own, they’ll be putting me off with some old-fashioned rubbish, and making me pay for the last new kick.”

But for his vivid recollection of the “beautiful Ellen,” as he had seen her leaning on the arm of Lord Edward Sutton the night before, Walter would, perhaps, have deprecated Lord Dartford’s exhortations to take no further thought of *him*, as he was quite content to remain in Cavendish Square during their expedition into the city. But as his future brother-in-law had previously announced a visit from the Marchioness, at two o’clock, which must keep the rest of the party at home to receive her, there was no excuse for non-compliance with the request of Colonel Hamilton.

“And I tell you what you shall do for *me*,

my dear fellow, if you are really going to Rundell's," said Lord Dartford. "Tell them that the paste model they sent me yesterday for the diadem they are re-setting, is much too broad for the prettiest little head in England; and that they had better let one of their fellows take an exact measure, with gold wire or something of that kind, before they set to work. I must say," continued he, turning to Miss Hamlyn, "I think Rundell rather gone by, for any thing beyond a mere necklace, though they have unquestionably the finest choice of diamonds. But I saw that my mother would be affronted if I took the family jewels any where but to the house which has been in charge of them for more than half a century."

"Quite right!" said Lydia. "After all, what does it signify?—Diamonds are only valuable as the insignia of a certain rank and fortune; and whether arranged in a manner more or less becoming to the wearer, is of little consequence compared with the chance of vexing Lady Dartford. After wearing

them so long, she naturally looks on them as her own; and I should have been far, far better pleased had you left them at her disposal during her lifetime."

"By which I should have deprived her of a great pleasure in seeing you wear them! Whereas, even without having a pretty daughter-in-law as a motive for leaving them off, my mother has never worn the family jewels since the death of her husband. One word more, Walter. Tell the foreman he must apply to the Heralds' Office for the Hamlyn arms he wants to quarter in the new desk-seal they are making for Dartford Hall; or if you've one by you, perhaps you'll give him an impression?"—

These commissions, so soothing to the vanity of the worldly-minded Walter, reconciled him to the idea of a drive with an old gentleman in a low-crowned hat, who had not the excuse for his originality of costume of being a county member; and having determined to make his way along those dreary Boulevards called the City Road, as a security against an

encounter with his fashionable friends, he proceeded at a slapping pace through Pentonville and Clerkenwell, towards Gray's-Inn Lane;—how gloomy a contrast to the brilliant, gorgeous, animated, exciting line of road that divides the capital of France from its gay suburbs!—

“That's as fine a young fellow as ever I saw in my life!”—cried Colonel Hamilton, after a prolonged meditation upon the excellent temper and warm affections of the young Marquis.

“A perfect gentleman, in every respect,” added Walter,—giving to the word “gentleman” its most extended and best interpretation.

“Your good mother, with a mother's natural partiality, always adds, ‘as perfect as is compatible with a defective education.’ She, you know, has been a little Greek-and-Latin bitten, ever since your brother began to carry off the Cambridge prizes! I always observe, by the way, that women are twice as proud of the soldiership or scholarship of

their sons, as the fathers. If *you'd* been one of the heroes of Waterloo, for instance, instead of one of the cheesemongers,—poor Madam Hamlyn would have been desperately in love with ‘ guns, drums, trumpets, blunderbuss and thunder ’ for the remainder of her days !”—

“ Lucky, then, that I have fallen on times more pacific !”—said Captain Hamlyn, somewhat nettled, as is usual with the Household Brigade, at any allusion to his qualities as a carpet knight.—“ But apropos to Harry, my dear Colonel, you, who are in my mother’s confidence, which is the next thing to being in my brother’s, for they are one and indivisible, whereas with *me* he is beginning to establish something of an Esau and Jacob jealousy—”

“ Are you sure, Watty, that the grudge is not a creation of your own ?”—interrupted the Colonel, turning suddenly towards him.

“ *Quite* sure, as regards my will and feelings ! I love Harry with all my heart and soul. But, somehow or other, I have always

noticed that, between only brothers, an intuitive rivalry is apt to spring up."

"Cain-and-Abelship,—*I* call it—"

"Which so far exists on Harry's part towards myself, that, ever since his return from Italy, he has not been the same brother to me!"

"Why I thought you'd scarcely met?"

"We meet by letter, every now and then," replied Walter;—"but not as we used; and of all the painful things in the world, commend me to a half-confidential letter from one with whom you have been accustomed to communicate openhearted and without reserve!"

"But are *you* as frank as ever with *him*? Nothing but confidence ever begets confidence;—and if Harry has found out that there's a Blue Chamber in your own mind, of course he's right to lock the door of *his*! To tell you my honest belief, Watty, my boy, I'm half afraid there's nothing more difficult than for brothers to maintain total unreserve. Betwixt two friends, there are no jarring

interests, no mutual delicacies of a pecuniary kind, to produce closeness or hesitation. But what were you beginning to say, just now, about confidences likely to have been made me by your mother on Harry's account?"—

"Simply that, as she called in your influence to mediate between my brother and father, about the partnership in the bank,—and successfully as it appears on one side,—I thought it probable she might have been more explicit with you than myself, concerning the origin of Harry's indisposition."

"What the deuce!—is he *ill*, then?" cried the Colonel, becoming more interested in a conversation which at first appeared only a little outburst of fraternal spleen on the part of the handsome Captain.

"Have you not heard it?—No! by the way,—I remember now, to my shame, that my mother begged me to say nothing to you on the subject."

"Nothing to *me*?—why surely this mystery-mania is not becoming epidemic?—Well to be sure! If I find my dear good straight-

for'ard Madam Hamlyn beginning to deal in zig-zag, I shall feel sure that Truth has sunk much deeper out of sight than the bottom of a well!"—

"To exonerate my mother," observed Walter, making so close a shave against the wheel of an omnibus at Battle Bridge, that involuntarily the Colonel laid his hand upon the reins,—“it is but fair to say that her reserve about Harry's altered state of health and mind arises from a sense of delicacy to others. My brother, it seems, has some strong attachment—”

“The deuce he has!"—

“And an unprosperous one. In some way or other,—but the *how* is precisely the point concealed from *me*,—his compliance with my father's natural solicitude about the banking-house has been fatal to his hopes as a lover; and my mother declares that, since he gave in, he has been broken-hearted,—broken-spirited,—incapable of pursuing his studies.—Instead of distinguishing himself

and taking the high degree expected of him, his tutor has seriously recommended him to withdraw from College for a term, for the recovery of his health."

"God bless my soul!—this is bad news indeed!"—cried the Colonel, sinking back into the corner of the cabriolet to collect his thoughts, with a view of retracing all he was hearing to the concealments practised upon him by his daughter-in-law concerning her intimacy with Henry Hamlyn; and, after some minutes' cogitation, giving it up as a bad job,—so hard a matter was it to his simple mind to dive into motives or connect a broken chain of evidence, where his affections were concerned. "And what does your father say to it all?"—resumed he, after a long pause.

"Nothing,—for no one dares molest *him* with the history of his son's qualms of conscience, or dilemmas of the heart!—My father is so very practical a man, and so unapt to allow his own feelings to interfere with the discharge of his duties, that it requires

some courage to ask his indulgence for any frailty of the kind."

"But if this attachment of your brother's be of an unobjectionable nature—"

"Of course it is,"—interrupted Walter Hamlyn, warmly,—“or he would not have presumed to make a confidante of my mother!”—

"That's true indeed!—Then, by George! I'll speak to Hamlyn about it myself!"—

"As we know nothing certain on the subject, interference might, perhaps, do more harm than good," observed his companion, afraid of the evil influence which Colonel Hamilton's want of tact might produce over the destinies of poor Henry. "My father would be furious at the idea of a young fellow of his age pretending to form a serious attachment. Why, even I, whose prospects are so much more positive than Henry's—"

"Well—even *you*?"—cried the Colonel, perceiving him hesitate, as if afraid of having gone too far.

"Even I, my father says, must not venture

to think of marrying, unless I can make up my mind to an interested connection."

"*Sell* yourself, eh?—By George! Ellen is right! The trade of banking encrusts a man's soul with a yellow leprosy. However, I can't fancy that Hamlyn, who professes so warm a friendship for me, would take offence at my suggesting to him that his son wants respite and recreation. It would be a sin that Harry should lose all the ground he has been gaining, as one of the first scholars in the land, only that his father might have a little work taken off his hands a few months sooner than he wishes."

"If you succeed in persuading him, you would do us all a genuine kindness," cried Walter. "Harry is a noble fellow, sir! as you said just now of my friend Dartford; and the mere idea of his being over-weighted in study, in order to gratify the vanity of his friends, or satisfy the impatience of my father for his assistance in the banking-house, is a real affliction to me."

"Suppose we push on to Lombard Street,

then, after I've settled my business at Rundell's?" said the Colonel. "I can make a pretence of wanting money to pay for my purchase, and so have a few minutes chat with your father in his sanctum. He'll fancy I was afraid of alarming your mother by speaking out this morning in Cavendish Square."

"With all my heart!"—replied Captain Hamlyn, touching the flank of his fine horse as they emerged from Gray's Inn Lane; and the noble animal evinced some symptoms of displeasure at finding himself arrested in his speed by brewer's drays and other unaristocratic vehicles, strange in shape and alarming in sound to an habitual loungeur of the ring. In spite of the hurry and tumult surrounding him, the Colonel soon sunk into a reverie, whereof Henry Hamlyn and his lovely daughter-in-law supplied the absorbing interest.

Who does not know, or rather who *did* not know, the glittering fishes of Ludgate Hill, presiding over the doorway of that temple of pomps and vanities, which, after aiding to

bribe thousands of precious souls to perdition,—damsels, per force of diamond necklaces and diplomats, per force of diamond snuff-boxes,—while making the fortune of half-a-dozen partners, has disappeared from the face of the commercial earth, leaving its high priests in the House of Commons, to be hereafter translated, perhaps, to the House of Peers !—

Into the inner sanctuary of this gorgeous tabernacle did Walter Hamlyn conduct Colonel Hamilton, insuring him all the deference awaiting the friend of a son of Hamlyn the banker, the future brother-in-law of a Marquis whose family diamonds were resetting in the house.

To customers of such importance, it was of course essential to display a thousand things they did *not* want, in place of the one asked for ; and instead of teapots, forks, and spoons, the Colonel accordingly found himself called upon to admire gilt candelabra on their way to the palace, and pieces of presentation-plate, in the form of vases, groups, shields,

salvers,—each purporting to be a tribute of respect, by private subscription, to the most virtuous, most able, or most active of the human race. The genuine exclamations of wonder and delight of the worthy Nabob were so vociferous as to cause the cheeks of the apathetic man of Crockford's to tingle with shame, as well as to justify the shopmen in further exhibitions while Captain Hamlyn was engaged in the execution of his brother-in-law's commission; exhibitions ending with the purchase of an opal bracelet for his daughter-in-law, and a diamond fan-mount for the Marchioness elect, which Colonel Hamilton was easily persuaded were the most elegant and fashionable trinkets that ever dazzled the eyes of an enlightened public.

“To think what elements of human happiness are lying swamped and hoarded up in yonder Vanity-fair!”—ejaculated he, as they took their places again in the cabriolet, after issuing instructions for the engraving of the teapot with the crest they *conceived* must be the Markham's, as figuring on a very extra-

ordinary-looking gig which had been dying a natural death by inches in the open coach-shed of Ovington Vicarage, for the last half-dozen years.—“Why, if the plate, on sale or in deposit there, were melted down, and the jewels sold at prime cost, one might buy up St. Giles’s with the proceeds; and establish on the spot an Irish city of refuge, too clean, airy, light, and decent for people to die in of drunkenness or typhus, or cut each other’s throats for pastime!”—

“I fear it will not do to refine on such points of moral economy!” replied Walter. “I fancy that, to complete the balance of society, we must have both diamond setters and rookeries.”

“To complete the balance of society *as at present constituted!*” interrupted the Colonel. “But things may mend! Your grandchildren may see, (for though I’m to be the last of my race, I suppose you won’t,) the institution of sumptuary laws;—or may be, a scientific discovery for the chemical creation of diamonds, neutralizing their value. There may

be a philosopher's stone in the crucible yet ! The light ages may discover what the dark ones failed to put together ; and 'tis *my* opinion, that if all these metropolitan colleges and universities, conservative or destructive, don't manage to blow-pipe us a new metal or two, in addition to their new gases, they're not worth their brick and mortar !"

"Still, luxury would assume some other shape !" —pleaded Walter.

"Luxury itself may become vulgar !" cried the Colonel. "The march of enlightenment may *make* it vulgar. *There* would be a triumph for the Great Unwashed ! Why, after all, Watty, Time is only a great rubbish-hole, which mankind are always labouring to fill up with dust and ashes,—broken prejudices and fragments of old abuses,—in order to create a solid level for future ages to walk steady upon, eh ?—But, by George, one musn't be too speculative here, in Lombard Street ; or we may chance to get shot out on the pavement, and find a level more solid than agreeable !—Shan't you come in with me at the bank ?"—

“ If you give me leave, I will wait for you in the cab. My presence would be a constraint upon your conversation with my father,” replied Walter, drawing up before the door of Hamlyn and Co.

A couple of minutes, however, after Colonel Hamilton had disappeared through the oaken swing-doors with their brass network, one of the junior clerks made his appearance (taking his pen from behind his ear out of respect to his employer's son and heir, as any other man would have touched his hat), begging, in Colonel Hamilton's name, that Captain Hamlyn would please to step out, as he wished to speak with him.

Walter had nothing to do but comply; though he had a particular objection to exhibit his *recherché* style of dress and admirable getting-up to the wonder or sneers of his father's sober house of business; and, on reaching the compting-house, he had the additional vexation to find the concession superfluous.

“ Why, Hamlyn's not come to business

yet!" said Colonel Hamilton; "and all his clerks seem to think he's been run away with by the old brown horse, who's as likely to take a start as Meux's brewhouse! However, I've put the head-clerk (that smooth-tongued fellow with the bald head) out of his pain, by telling him your father is only gone to his lawyer's in Norfolk Street; and, as the consultation must have lasted this hour and a half, he can't be much longer. — So we'll even wait for him in his room."

Walter would much rather have retreated to his cab. But he saw that the eyes of all the clerks (except one or two who were engaged in noting the items of an account or numbers of a note, with their finger on the numerals) were fixed admiringly upon him, while Spilsby stood surveying his inches with as close a scrutiny as though he were measuring him for a coat;—and consequently had not courage to contend against his companion's decision. In a moment, they were ushered by Spilsby into the banker's room,—cold, neat, sunless, dull,—with its eternal

half-dozen horse-hair chairs, its faded writing-table, and old-fashioned silver standish.

“And you wonder that I should have disliked the idea of wasting my life in this dreary den?” exclaimed Walter, casting his eyes round the untempting scene of his father’s daily labours.

“Indeed I don’t!—I only wonder that *you* should presume to wonder at Harry’s entertaining the same antipathy.”

The expression of his surprise was silenced by the re-entrance of Spilsby, who came to bring Colonel Hamilton the three hundred and fifty pounds he had asked for, and request his signature to the receipt.—And lo! just as the Colonel, after having had the notes told into his hand by the pragmatical clerk, had thrust them somewhat irreverently into his pocket-book, and his pocket-book into his pocket,—the door was sharply opened, and Hamlyn made his appearance with a face nearly as colourless as the paper of the notes!—With a single glance, he examined the countenance of the three,—his

son,—his client,—and the clerk, who had intruded into his dwelling the preceding night.—Having already learned in the compting-house that they awaited him together within, he trembled to surmise the motives which might have united such a heterogeneous assemblage.

That one look sufficed! Walter was disposed to salute with unusual tenderness the father, the disagreeables of whose habits of life were displayed around him in such prominent relief; while as to the Colonel, the idea of having money in his pocket which was about to melt out of it in payment for gifts to three of the people he loved best in the world, imparted a double share of benignity to his comely countenance. With respect to the clerk—who could pretend to decipher the ambiguous expression of so mere a mask!—At all events, however hostile Spilsby's ulterior intentions, his master saw that, at present, all was safe.

Meanwhile, the mood of the banker was very different from that in which, two hours

before, he had made his agitated exit from his house in Cavendish Square. He had been spending the interim in one of the spots where his person was sacred as those of the gods, and his *ipse dixit* as authoritative. The house of Wigwell and Slack fattened upon the litigations and legalizations of that of Hamlyn and Co., as certain insects on the trees from whence they imbibe their pitiful vitality. The constituents of the banker progressed into the clients of the solicitor; the latter being as much the obedient humble servant of the former, as the oak-apple is fluttered resistlessly about by every vibration of the oak on which it is encrusted. Hamlyn was, in short, the sun, in whose rays, reflected in the golden sands, the crocodiles' eggs of the law were hatched into existence.

It necessarily followed that though, in support of his unblemished reputation as a great London Banker, he maintained in his transactions with them the tone of the rigidly upright man,—the punctual, methodical Mr. Hamlyn,—he was often obliged to

insist upon the prosecution of petty delinquencies;—often compelled to borrow the strong arm of the law to crush those wretched vermin, those poor defaulters, called needy men,—who, if suffered to prey unmolested, would become fatal in the moneyed world as the legions of rats which in Whittington's time devoured the substance of the King of Barbary. This, though a necessary, was not a flattering occupation; and, after the endless unsavoury conferences which Hamlyn was forced to hold with Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, it was like “music after howling” to listen to the recital of the Dartford rent-roll, in connection with the marriage settlements of his “Right Honourable daughter.” After the villanous John Doe and Richard Roe-isms,—the processes of outlawry,—the persecutions, prosecutions, and incarcerations,—which constitute the killing and wounding of financial fight, to hear of an estate set apart in the days of King Stephen for the dowry of the “Baronesses of Darteforde,” being taxed for the future maintenance of a spinster named

Lydia Hamlyn, — was a satisfaction indeed!—

But this was not all!—Scarcely had he crossed the threshold of his house in Lombard Street, when he was accosted with the glad tidings that a Riga house, whereof that of Hamlyn and Co. held bills to the amount of £10,000, (concerning which unsatisfactory rumours had been for a week past prevalent in the city,) was not only solvent, but that the report which had created so much consternation in his mind bore reference to another Schreiber and Co., of Archangel, with whom they had no concern. Had the head-clerk been in the compting-house at the moment of his transit, this gratifying intelligence might have been held suspended over his head. But Spilsby being engaged with Colonel Hamilton, one of the juniors,—one of those who loved and was grateful to his master—communicated the glad tidings, breathless with the joy he was about to impart.

The tranquillized banker was accordingly

able to listen with exemplary serenity to the representations of Colonel Hamilton; and as it happened to suit his plans that Henry should not commence his duties in the House till after the ensuing Christmas, he had no difficulty in sitting down before them, to indite a most paternal epistle to his son; offering him every pecuniary facility towards absenting himself from Cambridge for six months, for the recovery of his health, by perfect leisure or continental travel.

For this sacrifice, he was more than repaid by the affectionate warmth with which Walter started up to press the hand which had been engaged in conferring a benefit upon his brother; while old Hamilton rubbed his own with glee at the idea of the surprise which Harry's unexpected arrival in town would occasion to Ellen; and the joy which Ellen's surprise might be made to produce for Harry.

“ You're made of more penetrable stuff than I took ye for, my dear Hamlyn !” cried

he. " But I fancy the best way we can reward you for proving so tractable a soul, is by making ourselves scarce. So give me the letter, and I'll post it as we go home."

" Are you afraid I should repent, and recall it,—or that it will not be safe in our letter-box ?"—demanded the banker, with a smile of arch urbanity.

" Neither one nor t'other ! But I'm come to an age when a bird in hand is worth *ten* in the bush ; which is the reason I'm not sorry we're to see the colour of my friends Moonjee and Company's hundred and twenty thousand pounds, before another month goes over our heads !—So now, good bye t'ye."

Released from this gratuitous tie upon his time, the banker was preparing to apply himself to the daily business which his unusual absence left at odds, enjoying in every fibre the delicious consciousness of relief from pecuniary pressure, and the golden gleams afforded by the vista opened by Colonel Hamilton's expectations and the Dartford connection ;—when the white head of the old

gentleman was again thrust in, with "Another word with ye, Hamlyn!—Your clerks yonder are sending off a poor fellow, on the plea of your being engaged, whom I've a notion you won't be sorry that I've laid my hands on!"

As he spoke, the Colonel again advanced into the room; followed by Walter and a stout-looking man in a round coat with corduroys and leather gaiters, whose costume afforded as singular a contrast to the trimly, well-cut gentility of Captain Hamlyn, as his wholesome, healthy, open countenance presented to the care-withered face of the slave of Mammon.

"Here, Durdan, here!" cried the Colonel. "I told ye I thought we could pioneer the way into the presence of the great man!" And to Hamlyn's great annoyance, Colonel Hamilton evinced no intention of allowing the audience to be a private one.

"Sarvant, Mr. Hamlyn!" said the farmer, unhesitatingly taking the seat hesitatingly offered him by the banker, while the Colonel

resumed *his*, and Walter stationed himself on the hearthrug, with ill repressed impatience. "The Col'nel here's been so friendly as to say you'd give me a hearing on a little bit o' business."

"With the greatest pleasure, Durdan!" replied Hamlyn, assuming an air of friendly affability, closely imitated from that with which, in Downing Street, he was usually accosted by Lord Crawley. "Is there any thing in which I am able to serve you?"

"I'm obliged to you, sir, nothing! To speak plain, Mr. Hamlyn, I've railed it up from Ov'ngton mainly to be of sarvice to *you*. You've heard, no doubt, sir, that *my* matters be a going *contrairy*. But 'tis an ill wind as blows no man good; and I take it you'll be summut the better for Jacob Durdan's downfall."

"I am sorry to hear you apply so decided a word to your affairs," replied the banker, placing his hands with an air of dignified composure on the polished elbows of his arm-chair. "But I trust, Durdan, they may still look up."

“Not they, nor their master neither!” replied the farmer, doggedly.

“I am truly concerned to hear you say so, Durdan! but—”

“No great call, sir, for you to trouble yourself much about the matter!”—interrupted the farmer, shrugging his shoulders, with the impatience of a man whom misfortune has rendered mistrustful of fine words. “You and I’ve been uncomfortable neighbours, Mr. Hamlyn. But that’s over now! Shan’t trouble nobody at Ov’ngton much longer with *my* company! So, whether you liked my dealings, or I yourn, don’t much matter to neither.”

“I can assure you, Durdan, that as far as regards that little trespass business—”

“No matter, sir, no matter! You stayed proceedings, at the request o’ the good Col’nel yonder, and there’s an end on’t! May be, if I’d been better up in the world, they’d never been begun.”

But for the presence of Colonel Hamilton, the banker would probably have put a speedy

end to an interview that opened so unsatisfactorily. But the old man kept nodding and winking beseechingly at him, in order to bespeak indulgence towards a poor fellow, harassed by adversity out of his good manners.

“ The thing’s *this*, Mr. Hamlyn,” resumed Durdan, after gulping down an uneasy feeling in his throat — “ my farm’s in the market ; and—”

“ You are looking out for a purchaser, eh ! Durdan ?”

“ *Contrairy*, sir,—purchasers be a looking out for *me*. There’s Squire Barlow been a haggling with me, like a Jew pedlar, ever since the news of my misfortun’, (a’ter the burning o’ the Liverpool warehouses ; with my last consignment o’ corn, uninsured ;) and I’ve a letter in my pocket from a Leamington ’torney, with an offer from one Shears, as has reilized a mint o’ money in the licensed vict’ling line, and wants to set up for gemman, and build himself one o’ them quality mousetraps they call a villa, on the ruins o’ th’ old farm !”—

Richard Hamlyn majestically shifted the crossing of his legs at the idea of *such* a Shears, Esquire, established in a Shears Lodge under the very nose of Dean Park!

“Provided you get a long price for your land, Durdan,” said Colonel Hamilton, “what’s the odds?—The colour of one man’s money is the same as another’s!”—

“Why the odds is this, Colonel!” replied the farmer, turning with a milder aspect towards the neighbour with whose partridges and pheasants he had been allowed to make acquaintance. “Ours ben’t a county o’ new comers, Colonel. You’ve seen the Bear and Ragged Staff monuments in War’ick church, and the Vernon monuments at Brax’am?—and you’ve, maybe, heard Squire Grat’ycke o’ Grat’ycke tell of his ancestors being knights o’ the shire summas about the time o’ County Guy o’ Guy’s Cliff, or thereabouts. Even Squire Burlow, though forced to take wages as looker to Lord Vernin, have parchments to show for the lordship o’ the manor of Ald’r’am, dating from days when Papists and Pro-

testants were roasting of one another in Smithfield Market. All this you know better nor I ; for never was there a 'sides these county gentlefolks didn't take care to din it in your ears !”

Walter Hamlyn began to testify signs of growing impatience by a vigorous poke of the fire ; but his father looking round, quieted him by a glance of reproof.

“ Well, sir ! — if so be these grander folks are proud o' having a deep-struck root in the county (for what roots be stronger than the dead we lay in the soil, from generation to generation ?) *I've* just as great a call to think much o' the Durdans having been 'spectable yeomen on their own land, as *my* title-deeds will prove, from the time *my* ancestor joined old Crom'ell's forces at the battle of Edge'ill with his family and farming-men. Durdan's Farm, Mr. Hamlyn, has its name in the county as well as Ken'lworth or War'ick Castle ; and if so be I'm forced by the badness o' the times to part with what's as close to me as the blood in *my* veins, I'd rather make a worse bargain,

sir, and be sure th'old farm should stand, and th' old name o' Durdan's hold good, than have a pothouse-keeper's son making a heap o' rubbish o' the roof I was born under, and blotting my father's name out o' the county, as though 't had ought to be 'shamed on!"

"Bravo, Durdan!—Well said, my old Trojan!" cried the Colonel; "there's more pluck in that speech, man, than in all the gammon ever spouted on the hustings by all the Vernons in the shire!—But can't matters be brought about, think ye, to prevent your parting with it at all? A mortgage—now?—If a good heavy mortgage—"

"Thank ye, Colonel—thank ye heartily and kindly," interrupted Jacob Durdan, in a more subdued voice, now that, having exhaled the spirit of his pride, the reality of his position forced itself anew upon his mind. "Every thing's been done as *could* be done to put off the evil day, — that is, every thing in honesty. No doubt I might shuffle on, with the chance o' coming to a break at last. But never should I get a wink o' sleep on my

pillow, if I thought there was a chance of e'er a man living being the worse for my father's son ! Mr. Hamlyn here can understand *that* ! Mr. Hamlyn, who knows that the great name borne by Old England in her public dealings is maintained by the same proud feeling in the breasts of millions o' rough, hard-worded fellows, as little thought on as myself by lords and ladies !”

Thus appealed to, the conscience-stricken Richard Hamlyn muttered inarticulately one of those truisms about the unblemished national probity of Great Britain, which he usually reserved for his speeches from the chair at city meetings, or his place in the House of Commons.

“ Case is this, Col'nel !” resumed Durdan, turning short towards the only person present for whom he entertained sufficient respect to care about the impression he was making. “ When my old father died, he left his matters at six and sevens. I was a young man, sir, with a family o' still younger brothers and sisters to purvide for ; so, as in duty bound tow'rd the old man I'd laid in the grave, who'd fit a good

fight for us all so long as body and soul held together, I worked hard for 'em all, and lived sparingly. And what's more, I guv up the thoughts o' marrying (as most young fellers o' my age have a mind to) till I'd put 'em all out in life; having first and foremost shackled myself with a gnawing worm of a mortgage. For I didn't feel the property my own, so long as e'er a soul living had a right to say that old Jacob Durdan as was dead and gone had left a shilling in arrears. Till I paid my father's debts, I lived without salt to my porridge; — but my porridge tasted none the worse for *that*, I promise you!"—

By this time, the irritation of Richard Hamlyn was excited almost beyond bounds by the schooling of these cruel rebukes, and the more so, that he saw even the levity of his son subdued into respect toward the honest man before him; while Colonel Hamilton kept passing his hand across his shaggy eyebrows in a manner which there was no sunbeam straggling into that dull, dreary apartment, satisfactorily to account for.

"And so, gen'lemen," resumed Durdan,

“finding that late and early work — saving and sparing—don’t suffice to make head again the badness o’ the times, sooner than bring matters to the last extremity and disgrace to an honest name, by getting into the Gazette, I’ve made up my mind to sell, — pay every shillin’ in the pound, — and as to living on a crust, why that I’ve done already, without grumblin’ ! And knowin’ Squire Hamlyn was once thinkin’ o’ the farm, and that if we come to a deal he would be for keepin’ up th’old homestead, and leavin’ it th’old name o’ Durdan’s Farm, so that my nephys and nieces may know, fifty years hence, there was *once* a property in the family where their forefathers was born and died on their own belongin’s, I’ve give no answer to Burlow, nor to Shears’s ’torney, nor asked nobody to look about for a purchaser, ’fore I inquired if so be it suited *you*, sir, to come down with the money.”

Richard Hamlyn budged not so much as an eyelash in reply to this appeal ; for, with the incredulity of a grovelling mind towards every nobler sentiment, *he* doubted not that the rude

eloquence of Jacob Durdan was a *get up*, in hopes to raise the price of his farm.

But Colonel Hamilton was more generous. Steering the intermediate course between the severity of the man of business and the tenderness of the man of feeling, he inquired, in plain English, the value set by the farmer upon his property.

“You must tell us exactly what you ask for the old house and land, Durdan,” said he, “before your proposals can be entertained.”

“I know what old Squire Hamlyn offered my father for ’em,” rejoined the farmer, “when first as ever he enclosed the Dean lands into a park. But land’s worth half as much again, now-a-days, let alone that the farm’s gained a mint in value by that same enclosure. However, I’m no great dab at figures, or may be I should have made a better job o’ my affairs; and the best way o’ coming to the pint as to price, gen’lemen, is to show you Squire Burlow’s offer, and the letters o’ the Leamington ’torney, leaving you to judge what offers you choose to make. On’y not to

misguide you with the notion that I want to ris the valu' upon you by the threat of an unpleasant neighbour, I tell you fairly, Mr. Hamlyn, that though at sixes and sevens in my accounts, I'd sooner take a trifle less from *you* than more from either o' t'others, on the consideration as afore mentioned."

" And I can candidly assure *you*, Durdan," replied the banker, gravely, " that had it suited me to make the purchase at all, a few hundreds, more or less, would not have been the object to deter or encourage me. But I am sorry to say, the disastrous position of the commercial world compels every man engaged in business to hold his resources at his disposal; and, even if the present depreciated value of agricultural produce were not sufficiently alarming to all landed proprietors, I should—"

" In one word, sir," said Durdan, rising from his seat, and buttoning up the coat which the rousing fire stirred up by Captain Hamlyn had compelled him to open in the heat of his explanations—" in one word, you're not

disposed to come down?—Well, sir, in that case, having done my dooty to all parties, I have only to close with the gen’leman in the ’Delphi, to whom Squire Burlow’s referred me as empowered to examine the title-deeds for Lord Vernin. No offence, sir, I hope for ’trudin’ on your time ; and I wish you heartily your health, Colonel Ham’lton, in case I should be out o’ the country afore your return to the Manor!—If I might make bold, and the breed o’ white peacocks could be accept’ble, Col’nel, (which you and the young lady admired so much the day you druv’ over to Durdan’s,) I would ask you the favour, Col’nel, to let me send ’em over to Burlin’ton in place o’ being sold with the stock?”

While Colonel Hamilton was thankfully acknowledging this farewell act of neighbourly courtesy on the part of the unfortunate farmer, the mind of Richard Hamlyn was becoming distracted between the idea of the molestations likely to be practised upon him by Barlow of Alderham, fighting under the flaunting banner of all the Vernons, and his

dread lest the prying Spilsby should be at that moment stationed between the double doors dividing the compting-house from the parlour, obtaining further insight into his financial dilemmas. He was roused from his abstraction by the voice of Walter.

“ Might it not be as well, sir,” inquired his son, “ to think over these proposals, with reference to the Burlington property, if not to your own? Surely, at all events, among your moneyed friends, it might be possible to find an advantageous purchaser for Durdan’s, more agreeable to your feelings than either this Leamington innkeeper, or the agent of Lord Vernon?”

“ Mr. Durdan, you see, is pressed to conclude the business,” replied his father, much vexed that the explanation of so intimate a portion of his private affairs should have been disentangled in presence of his son and Colonel Hamilton. “ I should otherwise have been glad to take the matter into consideration.”

“ My father would be glad to take the matter into further consideration, sir,” hastily

repeated Captain Hamlyn, interrupting the civilities exchanging between Jacob Durdan and his Lord of the Manor. "Would it be inconvenient to you to leave the matter open for a day or two?"—

"I couldn't, in course, Capt'n Hamlyn, expect a gentleman to be ready with his 'ay' or 'no,' at a pinch, in a matter of so many thousands," replied the farmer. "Inconvenienced I *must* be, any way. But if the Colonel here will answer for't to give me Squire Hamlyn's answer, by letter, by Thursday's post, I'll neither meddle nor make with the men o' business in the interim. I know very well that if once a plain man like me gets springed in the noose of their palaver, his neck will be wrung round, or a nail driv through his words, afore he knows where he is; and so, in course, I'd rather deal with gentlefolks whose yea is yea, and nay is nay! —What say, Colonel?—Will you stand my friend so far as act atween me and the Squire?"—

"With all my heart, Durdan!"—cried the

good old man. “ I’d give a groat you were able to stand the upshot, and keep the farm in your hands ; but if not, God forbid I should have my keepers snarling and yelping from month’s-end to month’s-end like their own terriers, with e’er a Jack in office in the employ of my lord paramount of the Hyde ! And now, let’s all be off and leave this gentleman to his concerns ! You’ll find Johnston and his wife at the Hotel in St. James’s Street, if you’ll look in ; though, by George, they’d be puzzled to offer you such cheer as you set afore me and Ellen, the day we called upon you at the farm.—Hamlyn ! your servant !—*This* time I promise you that my good bye is as earnest as your own acceptance across a bill. Walter, my boy ! I’m at your service.”

CHAPTER IV.

I have toil'd and till'd and sweaten in the sun
According to the curse : must I do more ?—
For what should I be gentle ?—for a war
With all the elements, ere they will yield
The bread we eat ? — For what must I be grateful ?
For being dust, and grovelling in the dust,
Till I return to dust ?—

BYRON.

A whole hour's deliberate consideration of these contending interests and embarrassments, did not suffice to restore the banker's mind to composure. He saw clearly that his hesitation to effect a purchase so important to the value of his property as Durdan's farm

was likely to excite the surprise, and eventually the misgivings, of both Colonel Hamilton and his son ; and, difficult as it might be to complete the necessary arrangements at that moment, he felt that, if within the scope of possibility, the purchase ought to be accomplished.

Richard Hamlyn had now attained one of those exciting crises, when a man is driven to attempt measures such as, in cool blood, he would repudiate as rash and unaccomplishable. Just as a physician will redeem at the last gasp, by some frantic stroke, the life of a patient with which for months he has been tampering,—or rather, just as a sleepwalker will direct his steps towards the broken bridge or crumbling wall, where those in full possession of their faculties must stumble, dizzied, into the abyss,—did the banker suddenly make up his mind to an act of desperation.

“ That man secured, all might yet be well with me ! ”—was his train of reasoning.—
“ Recruited by these timely succours, and

having the certainty of a noble return from my South American speculations, I might yet replace all the missing securities, — the Burlington Trust-money, — Hamilton's, — *all* my liabilities, — if I could secure the silence of Spilsby, and consequently, time for my affairs to come round. Something must be done! To struggle day after day within the coil of that domestic serpent, I neither can nor will. I feel blasted in mind and body by his pestiferous breath! A death by slow poison,—a conscious death,—a gradual decay of the flesh and the spirit, — were not more loathsome than to be waited upon by his clammy touch, — haunted by his stealthy tread, — addressed by his meally voice, — watched by his cunning eye. By the God of heaven! — my breath seems stifled when I think upon him!"——

And in the irritation of his soul, with a sudden jerk he pulled the bell beside his writing-table.

"Send Spilsby hither!" — cried he, to the counting-house footman, who answered his summons, with a coalscuttle in his hand.

The head-clerk, who, conscious for some days past of his extended and extending power over his employer, had noticed with triumph Mr. Hamlyn's dexterous avoidance of a *tête-à-tête*, — could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears, when thus summoned to his presence !—Delivering to one of the juniors the bill of exchange he was filling up for the signature of an expectant customer, he turned down the wrist of his coat, and settled his collar, as if proceeding to an audience of some man in power. The altered countenance of Mr. Hamlyn as he entered the counting-house in the morning had not been lost upon him. He felt confident that a decisive blow was to be struck between them. But, unlike his master, Spilsby's feelings were undisturbed by the prospect of the collision. *He* was as cool,—as malignantly cool,—as a

toad that under the cold stone
Days and nights hath, thirty-one,
Sweltering venom sleeping got !—

and it was with his usual hardened air of

self-reliance he entered the parlour of the banker.

In the interim, though but the lapse of a few minutes had occurred, the agitation of Richard Hamlyn, — the unusual agitation of that measured and imperturbable man, — had attained a pitch which caused his heart to beat as with the strokes of a hammer; and sent all the blood within him throbbing into his head, till his shot eyeballs assumed a terrible appearance.

The moment the bald-headed clerk had closed the door cautiously behind him, Hamlyn advanced with hurried footsteps, bolted it, and put the key into his pocket.

“Sit down, sir!” — said he, addressing the astonished clerk, in a hoarse voice, — how different in tone from the conciliating blandishment with which for weeks past he had accosted him! —

“Sit down, sir!” — said he again, in a still more peremptory manner, — perceiving Spilsby hesitate, — not from respect, but the dread perhaps of seeing a knife glitter in the hands,

or a pistol concealed under the blotting-book of the desperate man he was confronting.—“ It is time that you and I understood each other !”—

The bald-headed clerk began to mutter something about his earnest hope that no misunderstanding had ever occurred, or was likely to occur, between them.

“ None !—I shall take care that *none* occur !”—said Hamlyn, in the same hoarse, unnatural, concentrated voice. “ I *know* that you are my enemy. Your menacing looks pursue me to my calm fireside,—molest me in the bosom of my family,—frustrate the discharge of my parliamentary duties,—and render my life a penalty and a curse !—You could not suppose I should long endure this ? As I said before,—time we understood each other !”—

“ I should be extremely sorry, Mr. Hamlyn,” faltered the clerk, affecting to humour the distracted mood of his employer,—“ if any inadvertence in my conduct had given rise to impressions of failure of respect.”

“ You lie, sir !”—interrupted the banker. “ There has been *no* inadvertence. Your least movement is calculated,—your slightest word instinct with cunning !—I see through you, Spilsby,—see through you like a pane of ill-favoured, cloudy glass !—And you fancy you see through *me*, in return. But you are mistaken ! There are recesses in *my* mind and conduct which one like you can never penetrate ; and into those, I am at any moment able to dive, and defy your detection !—Do you hear me, Mr. Spilsby ?—*to defy your detection !*”

The interpellation seemed almost needful ; for the head-clerk had the appearance of being stultified by the sudden explosion of this unlooked-for storm. It was the first time in the course of their long connection, that he had seen the banker in the slightest degree disturbed ; and to behold him thus palpitating and convulsed by struggling passion, was as if the gates of hell had suddenly opened before him.

“ I tell you,” persisted the banker, coming

closer towards him, and lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper, as if it suddenly occurred to him that the conference might be overheard by others as crafty as themselves,—“ I tell you that, like the fish, which, when pursued, has the faculty of discolouring the surrounding waters to baffle its enemies, were you to execute your evil designs towards me, I would so perturb and trouble all which surrounds me, that *you*, sir, *you* yourself, should be involved, within an inch of the gallows, in our common ruin!—This is no jest, sir, no idle menace!—You have no more conception of the extent to which my schemes extend, than you have of the nature of your share in the embezzlement which, at this moment, places you in my power!”

At this accusation, every vestige of colour forsook the cheeks and lips of Spilsby.—Though an artful, he was by no means a strong-minded man; nor, indeed, have powerful minds *ever* resort to the cunning which characterized his habits. He was accordingly overawed by the audacity of Hamlyn's tone,

and the ferocity of his denunciations! With the worst opinion of his employer, he believed him capable of having placed the golden cup in the mouth of Benjamin's sack, for the purpose of accusation. By what effort of legerdemain Hamlyn had replaced the missing securities, justifying such bold defiance, he could not conjecture. But he had little doubt that the same nefarious machinations which had extricated the banker, might have transferred suppositious guilt to himself!—

“I can assure you, sir,” pleaded he, with the humblest deprecation, “that I am neither your enemy, nor your defrauder. If I have been so unfortunate as to offend you by declining the consular appointment you were so generous as to procure me, I am willing to prove my zeal by accepting it.”

“A well-imagined submission, truly, knowing that it is filled up, and your chance wasted!—No, sir!—It would no longer suit me to lose your valuable services;—that is,” continued Hamlyn, with a grim smile, “to lose sight of

you !—*Here* you must abide, Mr. Spilsby. You told me, the other day, that such was your wish—that you desired no better.—Your ambition shall be fulfilled !—And now, listen to me,—listen to a plain statement which involves the vital interests of your future destinies !—You fancy you have a hold over me ; that I have committed myself by lapses of discretion,—nay, why not speak out ?—breaches of honesty—of equity—that place me in your power. Suppose this granted !—What do you pretend to gain by the denunciation ?—Will my customers thank you for the announcement of the abstraction of what you have it not in your power to replace ?—If this house were closed to-morrow, what are you the better for its bankruptcy ?—You lose your salary, your situation, your respectability. Other houses of business would be cautious of engaging a head-clerk out of a house that had disgraced itself ; more especially a Judas—a Judas, sir,—who has attempted to sell his master. You would be placeless, homeless, friendless ; ay ! and, in the sequel, perhaps,

emulate the tardy repentance of that same Iscariot, *who went and hanged himself!*”—

“ If I entertained any views or intentions, sir, of the vile nature to which you advert,” said Spilsby, in a low, broken tone—for he was thoroughly unmanned — “ I should deserve these insinuations. But really—”

“ If you do *not*,” retorted Hamlyn, “ you will have the less hesitation in acceding to the terms I am about to propose to you. Your salary in my establishment amounts, I fancy, to four hundred per annum?”—

“ To four hundred.”

“ It is my intention to double it. I have here a paper awaiting your signature. It contains only a few lines, and need cost you little deliberation. You will find yourself required to pledge yourself to secresy, public and private, with regard to the affairs of the house (which you admit to be fully known to you), on condition of receiving the sum of eight hundred pounds per annum, paid quarterly; and a further *douceur* of two hundred guineas, every Christmas, according as you

may refrain from annoying and harassing me by petty irritations. If you fancy me likely to compromise our mutual animosity by a large sum in ready money, you are mistaken. I have neither the power nor the will. Make up your mind, therefore, to accept a handsome competence,—one thousand a year,—at my hands, so long as the house shall keep open; or do your worst—ruin *it* and *me*—if you can,—and abide the consequences which I swear to you are at this moment impending over your head!”—

The clerk almost gasped for breath. There was something in the desperation of Hamlyn that seemed to cleave him to the earth! His tongue grew dry within his mouth, till he was almost incapable of utterance. To have called for help, overmastered the incensed man before him, and, exposed to the arbitration of the law the antagonism between them, would only accelerate the catastrophe of which he stood in awe. Spilsby felt convinced that, at his first movement, the frantic banker would rush upon him and lay him dead at his feet!

On the other hand, the terms of pacification offered him, exceeded his hopes. Without foreseeing exactly to what degree he might implicate himself in a felony by his avowal of participation in the previous acts of Hamlyn and Co., the prospect of an income of a thousand a year was *el dorado* to the clerk. Pentonville and lodgings disappeared before him.—He saw himself grown “respectable”—a householder—living cleanly and “keeping a gig;”—bringing up his sons to the learned professions, and his daughters at a genteel boarding-school!

Richard Hamlyn saw plainly the advantage he had gained. Already, his heel was upon the head of the serpent!—

“Your stipend is due on the first of next month, I think?” said the banker. “The first quarterly instalment lies before you,” said he, placing two hundred-pound notes beside the paper he had hastily drawn up, “the receipt of which you will have the goodness to acknowledge on the same sheet. Make up your

mind, Mr. Spilsby !—I have no time to throw away upon its vacillations.”

The bald-headed clerk cast a hurried haggard glance around the chamber, as if expecting its dingy walls to emit counsellors for his dilemma. Bewildered as he was, he would have given half the amount before him for an hour's leisure for the arrangement of his ideas. But this delay squared not with the policy of his master.—Five minutes afterwards, the notes were in Spilsby's pocket; the paper, duly signed, was deposited in the desk of the banker, and a mountain removed from the breast of Richard Hamlyn !

“ And now, Spilsby,” said he, with difficulty restraining his desire to cry aloud for joy in the fulness of his heart, when, released from its agonizing tension, the blood gradually returned to its usual channels,—“ we perfectly understand each other. If not friends, we are at least confederates for life,—confederates whose well-being is bound up in mutual conciliation. I shall receive you with all the consideration due to your confidential position

in my establishment, with more than you ever received at my hands.—Be all trace of this interview banished between us!—Nothing on *my* part shall ever recall a disagreeable impression to your mind.—From *you* I expect similar forbearance.”

“I trust, sir, I shall never lose sight of the deference becoming my helpless dependence upon you!” replied Spilsby, gradually recovering the power of thinking, feeling, and speaking for himself. “I would fain this explanation had never taken place.—But I have had no choice in the matter.—All I now desire is that it may be obliterated from your remembrance, as I shall strive to efface it from mine.”

Thus ended this fearful struggle for life and death; and no one who saw Richard Hamlyn upon Change that afternoon, sedate and courteous, receiving the congratulations of his intimates on the good news from Riga, and exchanging with the mere men of business with whom he was in connection, the usual forms and negotiations of the day,—

(while stockbrokers respectfully uncapped as he glanced their way, and many a grayheaded man of double his years stood aside with reverence for the passage of the righteous overmuch promoter of half the charitable institutions of the metropolis,) would have assigned the smallest credit to the asseverations of the bald-headed clerk, had he sworn on the Gospels in presence of the assembled magistrature of the city, to the truth of the scene described in the foregoing pages !—

But life is full of contradictions. Could we behold the individuals with whom we live in habits of social intercourse, in the closer relations of life and at all hours of the day, how few of us but would start back with surprise, in many instances with horror, on recognizing our utter ignorance of their real natures and pursuits ! Nor is this altogether the result of human hypocrisy ; human folly has a considerable share in the illusion. We see people through the medium of our prejudices, as often as through that of their pretensions ; endowing them with imaginary virtues for our worship, or suppositious vices for our abhorrence ;

and, when disabused in our gratuitous error, visit upon *them* the flights of our imaginations. Yet the lover who chooses to elevate the lady of his thoughts into a divinity, has no right to resent her proving herself a mere mortal; nor the public to create unto itself idols, for the mere purpose of knocking them into dust in the sequel, as mere puppets of wood or images of clay.

It was scarcely the fault of the honourable member for Barsthorpe, if the London world, after admiring for twenty years the excellence of his establishment, the perfection of his equipages, the activity of his parliamentary career, the liberality of his private,—knowing him to be neither a libertine, a gambler, a sot, nor a spendthrift, (the frailties most common in connection with capital dinners and a knowing turn-out,)—should choose to elevate him into the most virtuous of mankind,—one who might have been Bishop Heber the Apostle, had he not been Hamlyn the banker!—

The dinner-party which took place that

very day in Cavendish Square, was citable for its elegance and pleasantness, even among the many brilliant banquets succeeding each other at what the newspapers chose to term "the hospitable family mansion of Mr. Hamlyn." The party was not large. The Marchioness of Dartford, an habitual invalid, disliking noise and strangers, was charmed with the gentle serenity of Mrs. Hamlyn, and the lady-like propriety of her new daughter-in-law ; of whom, by the way, Lady Rotherwood did the honours to her sister, as though she were showing off a child of her own. Colonel Hamilton and Ellen, with Lord Crawley and Walter, completed the party ; and Lord Vernon might have judged it a sufficient reason for dismissing his French cook, and renouncing forced fruit and vegetables for the remainder of the season, could he have witnessed the perfection of gastronomy which demonstrated the vulgarity of an enjoyment thus successfully emulated by an upstart like the money-broker of Dean Park.

Colonel Hamilton whispered to himself

more than once in the course of the entertainment, that, in the art of dinner-giving, even Ormeau could not pretend to rivalry with the banker; and on such an occasion as the present, where the parties so well understood each other and were so perfectly happy, there was not room for the only deterioration ever perceptible at his table, namely, a certain formality arising from want of harmony and assortment among the guests. Lord Crawley, who had not seen his sister since her dangerous illness, seemed to take particular delight in a reunion occurring under circumstances so auspicious. The home secretary, always sociable, was unusually anecdotic and agreeable; either in compliment to the happy position of his nephew, as an object of disinterested affection in the bosom of such a family; or to the bright eyes of Mrs. Hamilton, whom he beheld for the first time, and hailed with enthusiasm as an animated muse, a model of all that was fair and noble, even before he discovered her to be the nominal heiress of the rich old Nabob, who had given him so valuable a lesson in

Indian policy, seasoned with elephantisms, at Dean Park.

“ I believe you mean to provide wives for our whole family, my dear Mrs. Hamlyn !” whispered Lady Rotherwood, to the banker’s wife ; while Lydia took her seat after dinner beside the *chaise-longue* on which her kind and admiring mother-in-law extended herself for a short repose previous to coffee. “ Not content with finding the dearest little Marchioness for my nephew that his wildest desires could have fancied, you have placed in my brother’s way the only woman I ever saw likely to distract his attention from the interests of public life. I never knew Crawley smitten before !”

Mrs. Hamlyn smiled, and of course disclaimed, as she glanced towards Ellen ; who, in order to allow more freedom of speech to the family party, had retreated into the little boudoir full of engravings, wherein that fatal compact had been made between the home secretary and the master of the house, the fearful consequences whereof were still con-

cealed among the mysteries hidden in the lap of time. But the smile was a hollow one. Mrs. Hamlyn heard with the natural jealousy of a mother, any allusion to a new conquest effected by the object of Henry's adoration; and though vexed, almost indignant, at noticing the profound attention paid by her eldest son throughout dinner to Mrs. Hamilton, beside whom he was seated, she felt doubly distressed at the idea of a preference on the part of Lord Crawley, so alarming to the hopes and happiness of her favourite child.

A new scene of triumph, meanwhile, was commencing for Lydia. The Marchioness of Dartford, an accomplished musician, and passionately devoted to the art, but debarred by the state of her health from attending operas and concerts and consequently a stranger to the *chef d'œuvres* of modern harmony, was overwhelmed with delight at the masterly performance of her daughter-in-law. The duets from the "Lucia" and "Norma," executed by Lydia and Ellen with a degree of perfection rarely attained by non-professional

singers, drew tears from her eyes ; and before the close of "*Deh ! con te,*" Lord Crawley and Walter were standing with Dartford behind the piano, in ecstasies, real or pretended, almost as great as those of the genuine amateur ; a circumstance laughingly pointed out by Colonel Hamilton to his friend the banker, as they entered the brilliantly lighted drawing-room together.

Was it likely that a man thus situated,—thus gloating in the enjoyment of every social pleasure, every social distinction,—should have leisure to reflect on the morrow with due solicitude upon his responsibilities towards his hundreds of clients ?—to ponder upon the interests of such people as the Vicar's family,—the children of a physician in Russell Square,—the widow Darley in Lemon-Tree Yard,—or Sir Robert Maitland in the Hebrides ; — the annuity of Miss Creswell, the governess, or the compound interest of the Ovington Savings' Bank ?—Astonishing, indeed, had he so much as deigned to recognize the existence of such nonentities, while entertaining with *their* means, and by the wasting of *their* substance,

the future relatives and present friends of the Marchioness, his right honourable daughter !

“Has your ladyship heard that Hamlyn the banker is likely to be created Lord Scrip, in the next batch of peers?” inquired Flimflam, of Lady Vernon, (beside whom he had manœuvred himself into a seat at dinner, that day, at a dinner-party at the house of one of her Northumberland neighbours, in hopes of worming himself into her good graces hereafter, as a profitable dinner-giver and fashionable lady patroness.)

“A joke, of course !” replied Lady Vernon, who, knowing Mr. Flimflam to be a person engaged to supply the small talk of dinner-parties, as Gunter is engaged to furnish bonbons for the dessert, conceived that such a man could not ask for bread without a latent pun.

“A jest exceedingly likely to prove earnest ! It is amazing how those Hamlyns are getting on ; and, we may add, their sons and daughters getting *off* ! That pretty simple-looking daughter has entrapped the best

match of the season; and the son is going to be married to a widow with twenty thousand a year, a woman who has lately refused some nobleman's son (I don't know whom,—but a capital match)—out of affection for the bright eyes of that silly young coxcomb, Captain Hamlyn of the Blues.”

Lady Vernon winced. Her withers were grievously wrung. That very morning, she had heard the first whisper of Alberic's humiliating rejection by Mrs. Hamilton; and had long begun to look upon Walter as a very passable *pis-aller* for Lucinda, in case the present season should prove as infructuous as the last. The heir of Dean Park was a bagged fox whom it did them no harm to secure, in case better game were wanting.

“I must say,” resumed Flimflam, (a professional man of infinitesimal calibre,) “that nothing appears to me more absurd than the position assumed in society by bankers, above any other species of mercantile men. Dealers in silver and gold are not a bit the less dealers, because the queen's counte-

nance is stamped upon their merchandize ; and why we should see such people as the Hamlyns honoured by royal visits and invitations more than other commercial people—”

“ Royal notice is often bestowed for specific purposes !” interrupted Lady Vernon, almost overlooking the audacity of the little insect that buzzed so familiarly in her ears, in consideration of the judgment with which his sarcasms were directed. “ But I can assure you that, in the county in which Mr. Hamlyn’s father chose to establish himself and purchase an estate, they are still looked upon in their true light of *parvenus*. Lord Vernon (their nearest neighbour) considers them highly respectable people, who do much good in their way ; but Mr. and Mrs. Hamlyn stand in a very different light in their country neighbourhood and among the London crowd which has less time to take accurate measure of claims and pretensions.”

“ Oh ! as to London,” retorted Fimflam, “ as your ladyship justly observes, in the pre-

sent disordered state of the social system, people go where they are amused, without asking by whom or caring how. If Madame Laffarge were to open a fine house in Grosvenor Square with the best music and best suppers of the season, she would be visited by every body. At the end of a year or two, if her music and suppers became less good, they would begin to inquire *who* she was, and pretend that they had never heard of her name till she was forced upon their acquaintance by their friend Lady So and So.—It is not every one who preserves, on such points, the rigid sense of dignity exercised in so exemplary a manner by your ladyship.”

“What possible object could I have,” gravely resumed Lady Vernon, “in cultivating the acquaintance of such people as the Hamlyns?—They have every thing to gain from *me*,—I have nothing to gain from *them*.”

“Why, as your ladyship justly observes,” replied Flimflam, “the show and ostentation of such an establishment as theirs, (devised, no doubt, as an advertisement in large

capitals of the solidity of the firm,) may be highly attractive to the vulgar, but is the very thing to disgust persons of genuine refinement!—I have dined occasionally at Hamlyn's (with whom I have parliamentary business that necessitates a sort of acquaintance), and confess nothing strikes me more than the contrast afforded by his flashy table to those of certain of the old and,—if I may presume to say so,—old-fashioned nobility, with whom I have the honour of dining,—such as the Duke of Saxmundham,—the Marquis of Oxgraze,—the Earl of Titheprig—”

“The Duke of Saxmundham is an uncle of mine,—Lord Titheprig is my brother-in-law!” observed Lady Vernon, fancying she was communicating news to Flimflam, who bowed in grateful acknowledgment, till his *toupet* touched the table-cloth.

“At Hamlyn's,” resumed he, “one is absolutely dazzled by excess of light, and the newness of the plate,—as if the host cared only to prove the amount of his credit with his jeweller and wax-chandler!—The comfort

of his guests is never thought of. Shaded lights, that would fail to exhibit the lustre of his silver wine-cistern, such a man as Hamlyn would not hear of !”

“For my part, I detest that sort of over-polished, over-frosted fancy plate, which looks as if it had just been figuring in Storr and Mortimer’s window !” sneered Lady Vernon. “It is like publishing by sound of trumpet that you are a man of yesterday, to exhibit such *very* new-fangled devices.”

“Then, the dinner itself,” resumed Flim-flam (whose rancour was excited against Hamlyn by having had it repeated to him by his bosom-enemy, the learned Theban of the Temple, that the banker had denounced him to Lord Crawley, on issuing from his last dinner-party, as “a failure—not so good as usual !”), “the dinner itself is in what I consider the worst taste !—Every thing garnished, — every thing *à la* some preposterous thing or other !—Such gilding of refined gold, and painting the lily !—*Turbot à la Tartare*, —and *faisan à l’estragon* !—

as if the simple flavour of the best things in the world were not sufficient to bribe the *beau monde* to dine with a banker!"—

"I suppose *some* persons *are* tempted there in search of novelty," replied Lady Vernon, contemptuously. "People tired of their plain roast venison at home find amusement in exploring the eminent cooks of London,—no matter with whom they may be living."

"And certainly, at Hamlyn's, one *is* sure of novelty!" observed Flimflam. "I recollect his giving us canvas-back ducks one winter, which he receives regularly from his correspondents at New York."

"I suppose there is a game-bag attached to his letter-bag?"—observed Lady Vernon, with a sneer.

"And, as your ladyship is probably aware, he cultivates, in his succession-houses at Dean Park, a variety of tropical fruits, which are grown no where else in England;—about as good eating as the waxen fruit of an epergne, with a little powdered sugar sifted over it."

“ Very good things to exhibit at a Horticultural Show, in order that his own and his gardener’s name may figure in the morning papers !” observed Lady Vernon. “ But I own *I* am humble enough to be contented with a good Providence pine !”

“ Even the pines at Hamlyn’s,” resumed Flimflam, “ are served as I never saw them in any other house. The pine-stands are of gold, with long, burnished, pendent leaves, in the form of the natural fruit.”—

“ Disgusting !” exclaimed Lady Vernon. “ Nothing more offensive than contact between fruit and plate, which can only be cleaned by substances fatal to the flavour. Fruit should be served exclusively on glass or china—”

“ Not by a banker !”—retorted Flimflam, with a venomous smile. “ Gold (often, I am afraid, *gilding*,) is the emblem of his calling,—the outward and visible sign of his inward *disgrace*. For, after all, as your ladyship justly observes, what can be more suspicious

than the colossal fortune (even if a *solid* colossal fortune, and not a mere colossal credit,) of a great banker?—By what means can it have been amassed, but able speculation with the fortunes of others;—by the risk of what is not his own, and what, if lost, he is unable to replace? For what purpose do we intrust our property to a banker?—To be taken care of, and rendered back on demand! If susceptible of being turned to account, the profit should be ours, or partly ours; otherwise, we incur the hazard without benefit in the gain. Coutts began life, we are told, with half-a-crown. How did he obtain his millions?—By gaining the confidence of rich men, and the credit of a man possessing the confidence of rich men, till he held in his hands, in deposit, the means of indulging his genius for financial speculation. It *was* genius, and it prospered!—But a blunder of Coutts's might have involved hundreds of families in ruin; whereas his prosperity enabled him to prove, by the alliances of his family, that the proudest

and most moral houses of the realm will grovel in the dust at the foot of the degraded altar of the golden calf !”

“Most true, indeed !” ejaculated Lady Vernon, beginning to discover eloquence in the rhapsodies of a man whose principles were so congenial with her own ; and not stooping to reflect that the principles of a dining-out-man are plastic to the prejudices of every house in which he is accustomed to pick up crumbs of cake and slices of venison.

“The fact is,” resumed Flimflam, perceiving that he was making an impression, “there are too many of these gilt counterfeits in society ! *Far* too much glare, and bustle, and show, has been introduced into the quiet resorts of the great world, by indulgent toleration of these Brummagen pretenders. — Like the vulgar *cornets à pistons* and Turkish cymbals which have produced such deterioration in modern music — these people make too much noise. If I were to date the decline of taste in England in all matters of art or literature, it

would be from the ascendancy of the moneyed interests. A financial aristocracy, a nobility of the counter, encourages artists, but extinguishes art. Mozart has been out of fashion ever since seven bankers' wives had boxes in the grand-tier; and it is well known that Lawrence attributed the gimcrackery of his latter portraits to the evil influence of city patronage."

"It is certain," observed Lady Vernon, "that the Vandykes and Lelys, whose practice was confined exclusively to the court, produced a very different order of portrait from the Shees and Chalons, compelled to perpetuate the necklaces and guipure lace of Portland Place and Harley Street."

"Even as regards literature," added Flim-flam, "just as all the unctuous dishes of the French *cuisine*, over-truffled and over-spiced, were invented for the *Fermiers Généraux* of the time of Louis XV., those dreadful, flimsy, flashy, unwholesome tissues of false sentiment and flippancy, called fashionable novels, were composed for the delight of the

bankers' wives. A *ragoût à la financière*, as I need not remind your ladyship, is a fricassee of coxcombs!—The favourite works on the boudoir-table of the Hamlyn tribe are those gaudy fool-traps, the fashionable annuals.”

“Too true!”—replied Lady Vernon, beginning to wonder why she had always conceived such a dislike towards little Mr. Flimflam. “But, after all, may there not be miching malicho in all this?—Are not these bankers interested in promoting a taste for every idle and useless expense which increases the value of money?”—

“A most luminous idea,—a most logical conclusion!” said Flimflam gravely. “Many a political economist might envy the origination of such a theory, and Montesquieu has gained credit by axioms less profound. But are we not sometimes over-apt to impute designs to our neighbours? The policy of Russia, for instance. Which of us has not heard, as long as he can remember, of the designs of Russia? Whereas, as Lord Crawley observed to me when I was dining with

him t'other day, (and Lord Crawley may be esteemed something of an authority on such points !) if Russia *had* any marvellous designs, would she be fool enough to let us find her out ?”

“What is that, my dear Flimflam?” — inquired a distinguished opposition member seated near them, whose ear was caught by such mighty names as those of an Empire and a Home Secretary.

“I was telling Lady Vernon,” said Flimflam,—enchanted to extend the circle of his auditors,—“that the other day Lord Crawley was pointing out to me the absurdity of attributing profound or crooked policy to the Russians, the most barbarously arbitrary of all European Cabinets ; a cabinet which belabours one *au moral* as it crushed Napoleon *au physique*, by the frozen hammer of Thor rather than by the polished steel of Machiavelism !” —

“Rather a singular audacity of expression for Crawley !” observed the gentleman he was addressing, with an air of polite incredulity.

“I can, however, attest its authenticity, for

he said it to myself!" replied Flimflam stoutly ; thereby entitling the persons present to attribute in all companies to the Home Secretary a speech and sentiment in which his real share was in the proportion of one pennyworth of bread to a monstrous quantity of sack.

But, saving for such exaggerations and amplifications as this, and such rumours as that of the Scrip peerage, what would become of the profitable occupation of the Pique Assiette, or diner-out?—a moral *gargotier*, who lives by hashing up with spices and condiments for the small-talk of his Saturday's dinner, the savoury morsels he has filched and carried away from the colloquial feasts of the preceding days of the week !

Verily, Flimflam had his reward ! He was requested by Lady Vernon, in the course of the evening, to do her the favour of calling upon her in Grosvenor Place ; and before four and twenty hours were over his head, had amused the dinner-table of a fox-hunting country baronet with an account of the absurdity of a certain ultra-fashionable Lady

Vernon, who assured him, — *him*, Erasmus Flimflam,—that she had been forced to desert her old box at the Opera, and ascend a tier higher, in consequence of the glare of the bullion and spangles displayed in the turbans and trimmings of the bankers' wives !

The following Sunday, the “familiar toad” assumed his place for the first time at the table of Lord Vernon, furnished with some capital impromptu anecdotes of Sheridan, Curran, and Horne Tooke, well adapted for the Whig atmosphere of the house ; and the sowing of the dragon's teeth by Cadmus was not more fertile in the production of strife and warfare, than the tale-bearing and tittle-tattle of the habitual diner-out, as exercised that day in Grosvenor Place !—

CHAPTER V.

Sunshine and storm,—th' alternate chequer-work
Of human fortune !

SHELLEY.

It was scarcely possible for a life of only four and twenty years' duration to present a succession of stronger contrasts than that of Mrs. Hamilton. The circumscribed horizon of her penury-stricken youth had been cheered by the affection of a mother in whose heart she reigned supreme ; and when the epoch of first love, the brightest of woman's life, was darkened and depressed by the persecutions so wantonly inflicted by the banker, the faithful devotion of Robert Ha-

milton had proved a haven in the storm, an anchor of safety and salvation.

She was consequently fully justified in the faith, which most women, whether justifiedly or not, profess in their heart of hearts, that love is the surest of *human* consolations; and when trouble came again, and she found herself alone in the world,—alone and exposed to the molestations which beset a woman so singularly beautiful,—it was but natural she should accept with gratitude the homage of such an attachment as Henry Hamlyn's, as her best chance of restoration to worldly happiness.

But she deceived herself. Her future career was not to be as they had planned it together in that happy land, where love is prematurely ripened by the influence of language, climate, habits, manners,—where every breath is a sigh and every word an endearment. They had agreed to enjoy together a life of study and seclusion, of modest competence, and mutual devotion. Instead of which, it was now decreed that they were to meet no more in this

world; and Ellen, instead of becoming an obscure, laborious, adored and adoring wife, found herself suddenly elevated to the enjoyment of every earthly luxury, and the gratification of every earthly vanity and whim. Followed and flattered by those who were enabled to place her in the highest rank of English society, adorned by the fond generosity of the Colonel with jewels and costly attire, she now possessed every thing the heart of woman could desire, except the one thing needful, the object of her sole affection.

While the fashionable world was as usual taking fire with enthusiasm under the influence of a new beauty,—while she was welcomed into such circles as those of Ormeau and Rotherwood House, with the utmost deference and adulation,—her heart was wrung with a sense of its loneliness! The passion of a silly fop like Alberic Vernon was only a source of disgust;—the affection of an amiable man like Lord Edward Sutton, a matter of regret.—For her whole soul was still con-

centered in that silent dreary chamber of the solitary student, who, if he had tacitly withdrawn the pledge of their trothplight, was not the less dear to every fibre of her heart.

To whatever place of public amusement poor Ellen was forced by the mistaken kindness of the good Colonel, her thoughts were constantly wandering to the past,—constantly distracted by surmises concerning the health and happiness of him whom, for a time, she had regarded as her husband. Though no longer able to attach a sentiment of personal pride to his college triumphs, she felt deeply mortified on learning from her father-in-law the sudden decline of his expectations; and from the moment tidings reached her of his indisposition, scarcely absented herself an hour from the company of Mrs. Hamlyn, so eager was she to obtain intelligence of the invalid.

Between these two women, united by a common object of boundless affection, not a syllable of explanation had been exchanged. Situated as they mutually were, it was impossible for one to say to the other, “dear

indeed would you have been to me as the wife of my son !”—or for the other to whisper,—“ fain would I have been to you as the fondest and most dutiful of daughters.” But without a word spoken, they understood each other,—appreciated each other,—loved each other. When Ellen entered the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, with anxious looks, Mrs. Hamlyn took occasion to inform some other person present that she had heard from Henry,—that Henry was better ;—and if Mrs. Hamlyn appeared too much out of spirits to attend some brilliant ball or gay party, Ellen would persuade Lydia to content herself with the *chaperonage* of Lady Rotherwood, and pretend a headach in her turn as an excuse for remaining at home with Mrs. Hamlyn.

Over their quiet work and tea-table, they never mentioned the name of Henry. Yet every syllable uttered between them bore indistinct reference to him or to his projects ; and, in reverting to the past, though the affectionate mother spoke only of Walter and her daughter, not a trait she cited of them,—

not a nursery anecdote she recalled, but it was easy to discover the part which Henry had borne in the affair. It seemed almost as if, conscious of the distance which Lydia's happy marriage must create between her and her parents, Mrs. Hamlyn were securing to herself future consolation in the affections of a new daughter.

Colonel Hamilton saw all this, and saw it with the utmost satisfaction. The banker's wife was his model of womanly excellence; and he rejoiced that the Ellen in whom he was desirous of investing his whole stock of human affections, should modify the somewhat lofty tone of her character after the submissive gentleness of Mrs. Hamlyn. He fancied that the energetic disposition of his daughter-in-law might inspire her friend with courage for her approaching separation from the young Marchioness; and if he indulged in ulterior projects concerning the motherly and daughterly affection arising between them, kept the secret strictly to himself.

“ At present, not a word—at present mum !

Ellen deserves some punishment," was the frequent result of his self-communing, "for entertaining so little confidence in the poor old man."

It was not always easy, however, to the candid veteran to conceal his participation in the secret so singularly revealed to him between his visit to Cambridge and the indiscretion of Walter; and, whenever he saw tears on the point of starting from the fine eyes of his beautiful daughter-in-law, he could scarcely forbear exclaiming, "Don't fret, my dear,—don't fret!—True love seldom runs smooth, they say. But when two young folks are agreed, and money is not wanting, matters *must* come straight at last!"—

Sometimes, when Ellen was in better spirits after one of her long interviews with Mrs. Hamlyn, he found it equally difficult to refrain from quizzing her concerning her flushed cheeks and unusual gaiety.

"You look so blooming this morning, my dear Nelly," said he, one day on her return to the hotel after having officiated as *chaperon*

to Lydia while sitting for her picture to Francis Grant, as a present for the Marchioness of Dartford,—“that I could almost fancy it was *you*, and not Lydia, who had been spending a couple of hours with the eyes of her faithful swain fascinated upon her face!—Pray, was Master Watty with you at Grant’s?”

“I have not seen Captain Hamlyn these two days,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, with some degree of resentment.

“Why, you won’t pretend to tell me, my dear,—(for as tragedy queenish as you may choose to look on the occasion,)—that you are not aware the handsome Captain is dying for love of you?”—

“Not what *I* consider love. Captain Hamlyn treated me with distant civility till he saw me assume a better place in society than he supposed would be conceded to so insignificant a personage. It was not till I had been stamped current by the homage of a fashionable fribble, like Mr. Vernon, that he began to pay me attention; and Lord Edward Sutton’s admiration was necessary to bring him to his present stage of gallantry.”

“ Well, well ! — whether his passion be natural or artificial, or rather whether it be spontaneous or derivative, admit that it becomes him admirably. Walter’s the handsomest young fellow in Lon’on, let t’other be whom he may ; and I feel pretty sure that if he didn’t bear the hateful name of Hamlyn, (against which you seem to have set your obstinate little mind, you’d be acting Lady Bountiful, some twenty years hence, at Dean Park, long a’ter we old fogfrums are dead and forgotten.”

The fluctuating colour on the cheek of poor Ellen betrayed the emotions which the Colonel had been maliciously bent upon calling forth by this exordium.

“ But we’re going to have a much worse specimen of the family on our hands shortly !” added the Colonel, intently watching her. “ The lad who’s been sapping all this time at Cambridge, finding himself likely to make a bad job of it, chooses to sham ill ; and his family have been gulled into persuading him forsooth to ask for holidays !—For my part,

I hate pedants, of every shape, sort, and size ; and shan't find my way half so often to Cavendish Square, now that we're to have the drawing-room littered with Latin and Greek books, and the solemn phiz of a Mr. Gradus, established there in eternal rebuke of our ignorance. Just imagine *me*, who find it a hard matter to speak dictionary English, stuck up opposite a fellow who fancies he can decline his nouns and conjugate his verbs, so much better than *his* neighbours !"—

" I was well acquainted with Henry Hamlyn in Italy," said Mrs. Hamilton with a degree of effort that crimsoned her face as she attempted to raise her full-orbed eyes towards the searching glance of the Colonel,—“ and can assure you, sir, that he is nothing of a pedant.”

" Oh ! he is n't, eh ?—Well, so much the better !—And pray, is he as good-looking as Walter ?"—

" In my opinion, far handsomer, for he has an expressive and intellectual countenance ;

while the good looks of Captain Hamlyn are the mere result of features and complexion."

" A *favourable* result, at all events, as I suspect that pretty finical Miss of Lord Vernon's is beginning to find out!—Last night, when Watty was taking so much pains about finding that seat for you at the Ancient Concert, Lady Vernon and her daughter looked as if they would like to mince you into *very* small pieces. But tell me, Nelly!—How came this chap with the intellectual countenance to be let off so cheap in Italy, between two such pretty widows as yourself and Lady Burlington?"—

" Lady Burlington has little temptation to marry again. *She* has two children to occupy her thoughts and affections. Even were she so inclined, Henry Hamlyn, who is eight years younger than herself, besides being a protestant and son to a man she abhors, is the last person likely to make her a suitable husband. With respect to myself" she paused—

" Well, my dear!—With respect to yourself?"—

“ I would rather not answer you,—for it is not in my power to answer you sincerely,”—said she with assumed firmness.

“ Thank you, Nelly!—Thank you, my child!—That’s just the straitfor’ard way in which I like to be treated by you!—I’d rather you’d hit me a box of the ear, any day of the week, than palaver me with a syllable’s worth of gammon. Well! I must see and judge for myself. We shall have the intellectual countenance here to-day, by dinner-time; and then, keep your secret, lady fair, if you can!”—

Mrs. Hamilton replied by silently kissing his hand.

“ I shan’t see him to-night, however,” said the Colonel laughing; “so don’t try and coax me to be a good boy, before I’ve an opportunity of being a bad one. To-day’s the grand let-off at the Chairman’s of the East India Company; and as the dinner is given expressly to *me*, I suppose I must go through the evening and my rubber, with the big wigs asked to meet me; twenty at dinner

most likely, and only a quarter of a liver amongst the whole party !—By the way, Nelly, (I may as well tell you, for ten to one those chattering newspapers will, if I don't,) that my poor old Rajah has sent over funds to the Company, to buy me a service of plate as a token of gratitude and affection; and so, my dear, some day or other, when I'm in a better place, and you and your good man, whoever he may be, settled in the house in Portland Place, you'll have a few spoons and sauceboats to help you set up housekeeping."

Great was the disappointment to the Colonel to find the following morning from Ellen, (who had purposely absented herself from Cavendish Square since the expectation of Henry's arrival,) that a note from Lydia had already apprised her of his non-appearance.

But in return for this unsatisfactory intelligence, the Colonel had strange news to communicate.

"I didn't expect a pleasant dinner yesterday!" said he. "Those kind of five-

course affairs are seldom agreeable. But, by George!—old Launchington's was worse than I'd bargained for.—I suppose the dinners in Cavendish Square have rather spoiled one for such matters.”

“Is Mr. Launchington's table then so bad a one?”—demanded Ellen, in the simplicity of her heart.

“Oh! twasn't that, my dear! Even at a state dinner, one is always sure of a boiled chicken or slice of roast meat, to prevent one's quarrelling with one's fare. The dinners in this house are no great things; with their eternal fried whittings and tepid lamb-cutlets,—but you never hear me complain. No, no! what I disliked so much yesterday, was the company.”

“I should have thought that, in such a house, you would be sure of meeting old colleagues?”

“I did, my dear! to the tune of a round dozen, which I was all the more sorry for, seeing that one don't like to expose oneself before old acquaintances!”

Mrs. Hamilton was surprised. She could

imagine but one way in which a gentleman ever exposes himself at a dinner-party ; yet had never seen her father-in-law in the slightest degree influenced by wine.

“ You see, they weren’t exactly *all* old Indians !” resumed the Colonel. “ Besides our own comfortable dozen, there were a few city grandees, and a monkey-man or two invited to put round the jokes, as in the old jovial days a good fellow used to be asked to help in putting round the wine. As ill-luck would have it, one o’ these prating parrots was seated opposite to me ; and took occasion to address so many of his jokes to me, and to ask so many idle questions, as a pretence for lugging ’em in, that I suppose I looked surly, or took him up short ; for, by way of excuse for having tried to scrape acquaintance, he alluded to having dined with me at Hamlyn’s. And so he *had*, as I admitted (when he brought it to my mind by some allusion to Lord Crawley) —that time I ran up with Sir Robert Maitland, and left *you* at Ormeau.”

“ I remember you dined there with a large

party," observed Ellen, who was pouring out the tea.

" Well, my dear ! no sooner had this ill-favoured, officious little monkey coupled the names of Hamlyn and Lord Crawley, than a pompous, pursy old fellow, (a Sir Benjamin something or other, who was sitting near us,) flared up into such an attack upon Hamlyn, that I was forced to take up his cudgels and lay about me in a style that's always disagreeable when one's enjoying a sociable party. But my man wasn't inclined to knock under, even when he saw me in such a deuce of a passion ; and didn't scruple to say that Hamlyn had sold his city colleagues to government,—that the little man in black, (Flimflam, I think they called him,) would attest that the ambitious banker was going to be created Lord Scrip,—and that in return for this empty distinction, he had withdrawn his parliamentary support from a question in which he was pledged, heart, soul, and honour, to advocate the interests of the great moneyed community in which he lives, and moves, and has his

being !—‘ Let Richard Hamlyn only show his face in the city after the perpetration of the apostacy he is said to meditate,’ said this stuffy old Sir Benjamin, (a Falstaff, without his wit !) ‘ and he may chance to have things thrown in his teeth, he will find it difficult to digest !’ ”

“ But is Mr. Hamlyn about to be created Lord Scrip ? ”—inquired Mrs. Hamilton, in some surprise.

“ If so, he is a greater ass than I take him for ! ”—retorted the Colonel. “ Hamlyn’s a valuable man, in a plain way ; but what the deuce should a fellow who has spent his life behind his counter in Lombard Street, have to do in the House of Peers ?—A banker lord would be a joke for a pantomime, or the comic annual.”

“ But when you said all this to your portly Sir Benjamin ? ”

“ It didn’t give me the means of contradicting his assertion that Hamlyn has pledged himself to government to support the Foreign Securities Bill ; which, if he have, all Sir

Benjamin said about him wouldn't be a quarter bad enough; for he would have to speak and vote again' his conscience, and the interests he had given his word to maintain to the last breath in his body!"—

"Unless I am much mistaken, *no* pledge and *no* promise of that description would be sacred in Mr. Hamlyn's eyes, if a coronet were dancing before them in an opposite direction!" observed Ellen. "In defending his cause, therefore, dearest sir, I trust you were not tempted to commit yourself by denial?"—

"*Commit* myself?—to be *sure* I was tempted!" interrupted Colonel Hamilton. "I told Sir Benjamin Backbite, as loud as I could say it, I'd pawn my life Hamlyn had never entertained for a single moment such dishonourable intentions; and called on the little chatterbox to second my defence of the man whose bread and salt, by his own account, he had broken."

"And *did* Mr. Flimflam advocate his cause?"

“So far from it, my dear Nelly, that he admitted his belief of every syllable of the rumour;—nay, he was base enough to confirm the notion (which I saw was pretty general throughout the party,) by declaring that, at the dinner at which we had both met Lord Crawley, in Cavendish Square, the Home Sec. and Hamlyn were closeted cheek by jowl in the boudoir for more than half an hour in closest confab; which ended with the minister’s saying to the banker, in *his* hearing, ‘We reckon upon your *voice* as well as your vote, my dear Hamlyn; and what you so anxiously solicit shall be done without delay.’”

“A safe and pleasant guest to receive into one’s house!” observed Mrs. Hamilton, with an air of disgust.

“Ay, but he’d better have kept his tongue from wagging; for I gave him a piece of *mine*, which was not quite so satiny as he could wish!—But, by George! *his* is the sort of pendulum that nothing *will* keep at a stand-still!”—

“It seems, then, that others are beginning to entertain, concerning Mr. Hamlyn, an opinion similar to my own?” observed Ellen, with a smile.

“The worst of it is, I’m afraid there’s some truth in the report. I didn’t heed the blustering of old Sir Toby Belch, nor the slaver of the backbiting punster. But after dinner, when Launchington took occasion to say something civil to me in private about his regret that any thing unpleasant should have occurred to me at *his* table,—he added, he’d rather I should have heard the ill-news elsewhere, which couldn’t long fail of reaching my ears. ‘I’m afraid, my dear Colonel,’ says he, ‘Hamlyn’s a lost man among us! In the great world, political intrigues are common. We hear of this duke or that lord turning his coat for a riband, or a place at court. But among commercial men, a man’s word must be as good as his bond. Unless the columns that support the great fabric of mercantile strength in this country are upright and

stedfast, there's an end of the credit of old England.' ”

“ Mr. Hamlyn had pledged himself, then, to his city colleagues, to support their interests on this question ? ” —

“ Pledged himself ? — Why, he held the stakes, as it were, for the rest. Never was there any thing like their confidence in him ! The business comes on to-morrow. I wouldn't be in the gallery of the house for a trifle.”

“ But, surely, with the friendly feelings you entertain towards Mr. Hamlyn,” observed Ellen, in spite of her antipathy to the banker, jealous of the honour of the family name of him she loved — “ *surely* you may be yet in time to alter his determination ? — See him, dear sir, persuade him — ”

“ I'm afraid such arguments as mine, my dear, would have little avail against the determination of a hard-headed man like Hamlyn ! ” replied the Colonel. “ No doubt he's made up his mind on premises *he* considers good.”

“ But you may show him better.”

“*Me*, my dear?—not I, Nelly!—I haven’t the gift of the gab, and am but a batter-brains at the best.”

“If you were at least to *try*?”—pleaded Ellen, courageously. “Half the objects in this world are lost for want of a struggle. We are too fond of concluding evil to be inevitable. For my part, I have the worst opinion of Mr. Hamlyn. I believe him to be base, calculating, heartless.—I believe he would sacrifice wife, child, friend, to his sordid speculations. I believe he would cause his children to pass through fire to Moloch, and see the existence of his sons blighted for ever, to secure the stability of his house of business.—But there are arguments for all natures and capacities! This man, whose ears are shut to the cry of nature, is open to the influence of every breath of worldly opinion. Tell him how he is thought of,—tell him how he is spoken of,—tell him that the very honours for which he is bartering his good name will be spat upon and despised by the very fools he is intent upon dazzling;—that

he will be received into the high order he is ambitious of attaining, with contempt and mistrust;—and thus, believe me, dear sir,—(*believe me!*) you will obtain an ascendancy over his mind. But what makes you smile?” said she, perceiving a sudden mistiness in the old man’s eyes, and a singular expression pervading his countenance.

“I was thinking that I never saw any one look more like a queen than you do at this moment!” ejaculated the Colonel. “Ah, Nelly! Bob knew better than his father, when he proposed to give me such a daughter. Why, *why* did I hurry him into the grave, with such a wife and such happy destinies awaiting him in this world!”—

“You did *not*, sir,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, in a more subdued voice. “It was the work of that man whom you mistakenly call a friend.—It was the doing of Hamlyn.”—

Colonel Hamilton shrugged his shoulders. “I’m always loath to believe the worst of my fellow-creatures,” said he. “I think now, as I thought the moment my poor son’s letter

and your noble remonstrances arrived at Ghazerapore, that Hamlyn acted for the best and judged for the worst. But if he complete the business attributed to him yesterday by those two fellows, Launchington's fat and lean kine, he'll be acting for the worst, and no mistake!—As to going and arguing with him, Nelly—by George! I shouldn't have the face to do it. 'Twould be like arguing with a fellow whose hand one found in one's pocket. The pickpocket I should be sure to knock down; and I'm a'most afraid I might be tempted to use some ugly word to Hamlyn, such as would ill become the lips of the father of those two poor boys, to whom he opened his house and heart when the deuce another soul they had to care for 'em, or give 'em a Christmas home!"

"Still," pleaded Mrs. Hamilton, "the truest act of friendship we can perform towards a man, is to undertake towards him some painful office, from which others recede."

She was interrupted by untimely visitors. Miss Creswell and her young charge, who

were sometimes despatched in the course of their morning's walk with messages to Mrs. Hamilton, made their appearance. For the Colonel, in his cordial love of young people, was beginning to transfer to Harriet the fondness and good offices he had exercised in favour of her sister ; and the young girl who, amid the hurry and occupation created in Cavendish Square by the approaching wedding, was somewhat overlooked at home, was never happier than when sent on an errand to the Hamiltons.

The note of which she was the bearer merely regarded an arrangement for accompanying Lydia that evening to the Marchioness of Dartford's, who had forwarded her invitation to Ellen, through her daughter-in-law. But the *real* purport of Harriet's mission was soon apparent to Mrs. Hamilton, when her young friend suddenly exclaimed—

“Is it not provoking, dear Colonel Hamilton, that, after all, we are not to have Harry in town?—Instead of coming to amuse himself among us, he is gone down to Dean, where he .

won't find a soul to speak to at this time of year."

"The deuce he is?"—cried the Colonel, stealing a furtive glance towards Ellen, who was wonderfully busy refolding Mrs. Hamlyn's note into the shape of a miniature dunce's cap.

"Think how dull he will be! Not a creature at Burlington to welcome him but old Carlo!—At home, only the bare walls. Even Dr. Markham, from Mrs. Markham's approaching confinement, disinclined to leave the parsonage!—How much happier my brother would have been here in London!"

"You forget, my dear," interposed Miss Creswell, with professional wisdom, "that your brother has serious pursuits which fully occupy his time, and dispose him against frivolous diversions."

"That's the very thing, my dear good ma'am!"—cried the Colonel. "'Tis because he has been duncing himself into an atrophy over his serious pursuits, that we want to get him among us, to be nursed and petted.

Frivolous diversions are bark and steel to him! The bow's been bent too far; and if we don't relax the strings, they may chance to crack; and *then* where are we, pray, with our serious pursuits? Well! I suppose this nonsense of his will cost me another journey to bring him to his senses! I don't know what I should ha' done with sons of my own to deal with; for even these boys of Hamlyn's make a penny-postman of the poor old man."

As soon as Harriet and the governess had departed, carrying with them Mrs. Hamilton's acceptance of the evening's engagement, Ellen succeeded in persuading the Colonel to leave the young recluse for a few days to the reaction of his feelings.—She was afraid of an interview between Henry and her father-in-law, unless in her presence. Aware of the rash nature of Colonel Hamilton's well-affected impulses, she was apprehensive he might commit her by cheering the sadness of the invalid at her expense with insinuations of an attachment on her part, which, tacitly

rejected as she had been, a sense of self-respect forbade her to confirm. Moreover, with the promptitude of a superior mind, she had already decided upon the course she intended to adopt both as regarded Henry Hamlyn, and the imputed turpitude of his father.

Within an hour after their breakfast conference, she had despatched Johnston to Euston Square, with a letter to be forwarded by the railway, which he was to take measures for getting immediately despatched by messenger from Rugby to Ovington; — a letter conveying to Henry Hamlyn the tidings of his father's political dereliction, and her own exhortations that he would instantly start for London, and use his influence against the consummation of a step so irretrievable.

For Ellen Hamilton was keenly alive to the consequences of such tergiversation. Though still firm in her determination never to become a banker's wife, she could not forbear cherishing such vague hopes and expectations as brighten the reveries of those whose

affections are deeply engaged; and her own future prospects appeared too closely bound up in those of Henry Hamlyn, and those of Henry himself (independent of all selfish considerations) were too dear to her, not to make her keenly sensitive to the possibility of dishonour to the family name.

Much as she despised Richard Hamlyn, she was aware of the high credit attached to his house, the fair reputation attending himself. Even at Ormeau, even among the Cossingtons by whom he was personally disliked, she had heard him spoken of with the respect due to integrity and worth. As a public man, she had hitherto felt compelled to consider him with the regard which, in private, painful experience instructed her to withhold.

Fervent, therefore, were her entreaties to Henry, if he valued the renown of his father and consideration of his family, to exert himself to the utmost.

“I am not afraid,” wrote Mrs. Hamilton, “that you will attribute this suggestion to any weak desire to see you again. Situated

as we have been, and are, such a meeting could only be fraught with pain and humiliation for both. *You*, I am sure, will appreciate my desire that the name I once fondly hoped would become my own, should stand spotless and unblemished in the history of the country. For this recreancy of your father *will* form a portion of its history! When a man betrays the interests of his order for interests of his own, whether that order be chivalrous or simply a concentration of commercial energies, he becomes important through the greatness of his infamy. — In this country, the aristocracy of wealth is beginning to be nicely balanced against that of descent; and a few generations may give it the ascendancy. I am assured that the measure about to be lost through your father's apostacy will strike a fatal blow at our commercial credit in foreign countries; and wherever canvassed,—to whatever remote spot the vibration of the injury may extend,—(*his* name, *his* name, which is *yours*,) will be connected with all the calamities—all the execrations—that ensue!—Dearest

Henry, — prevent this! — Exert your strong powers of reasoning to convince him that it is never too late to recede from a premeditated act of baseness. Reward his harsh dealing towards you by saving him from the consummation of an inextinguishable error!” —

This letter once on its way, she was happier. It appeared to *her* unaccountable, while passing a portion of the day with the Hamlyns, to see them so joyous and unsuspecting, with an evil impending over the family, of which herself and Colonel Hamilton alone seemed cognizant. In the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, she found, as usual, Mrs. Hamlyn, Walter, Lydia, Lord Dartford; who, after a slight expression of regret at their disappointment about Henry, returned to the discussion of hammercloths, Alençon lace, orange flowers, special licenses, and the number of *fleurons* which produced the surest combination of lustre and lightness in the setting of a diamond coronet, which her arrival had interrupted. In the gaiety of her youthful and innocent heart, Lydia was

imbibing, from the joyous high-spirited young fellow to whom she had pledged her affections, some portion of the worldly levity inseparable from his brilliant position ; and if Mrs. Hamlyn occasionally directed towards the happy thoughtless couple one of the saddened looks which those who have suffered much let fall upon the inexperienced novices in life for whom all that glitters is still gold, even her gravity at times gave way, under the contagion of the joy and prosperity that seemed to irradiate her children.

Lydia looked so happy, — so beautiful, — so full of bright and kindly thoughts, — as she sat with her hand enclasped in that of the noble bridegroom who had chosen her from the world, that the mother's heart overflowed with tenderness, and the sunken rocks of life were for a moment hidden by the tide.

As Mrs. Hamilton passed the dining-room to return to her carriage, humbly escorted by Captain Hamlyn, who adored as the future Lady Edward Sutton the beautiful woman he

had disparaged as Bob Hamilton's widow, she caught sight through the open door of the richly-laid table, which Ramsay was preparing for a dinner-party, with all its luxury of damask, crystal, china, plate,—its groaning sideboard, and glittering dumb-waiters.—

“ And these are the gewgaws,” mused she, deaf to the tender nonsense Walter was whispering under his mustachios,—“ for which this man is sullyng his conscience!—These be thy gods, oh Israel!—To think that hundreds and hundreds of men and women are induced to degrade themselves by debt, and harass their lives with remorse, in order that their ostentation may be graced by unmeaning gauds like these !”

That day, she dined with her father-in-law at Lord Cossington's. During the lifetime of his father, the income of the Marquis was circumscribed, and the right-thinking couple had sufficient regard for their own dignity to live within it. Their quiet comfortable house in Wilton Crescent was accordingly unembellished by the brilliant novelties and showy

elegance imparting distinction to the banker's establishment. A few pleasant friends at their board, a good plain dinner served upon it, and the cheerful conversation sure to ensue from such a combination, made the evening pass far more agreeably than was ever the case in Cavendish Square; where the mind of the host was always secretly intent upon the *spectacle* of his entertainment, and the mind of the hostess, upon the fluctuations in that of the host.

The only drawback upon Ellen's pleasure in the little social circle in Wilton Crescent, into which she was already welcomed as a friend, while the beautiful children of the Marchioness climbed familiarly on her knees, was the certainty that her presence had driven Lord Edward from his brother's fireside; in the dread of compromising his happiness by still further intimacy with her who had explicitly informed him her affections were engaged to another.—She was almost sorry when the carriage arrived to convey her to Lady Dartford's for the remainder of the

evening. The high spirits of the excited Marquis, and the bustle of the house of feasting, suited less with her present depression, than the sober conversational habits of the society of the Cossingtons.

The following day, at an early hour for the routine of morning visits, Henry Hamlyn was announced in the drawing-room in St. James's Street; and but that the Duchess of Elvaston, in pursuance of her old-fashioned habits, was already sitting with her, Ellen would have scarcely found it possible to refrain from an exclamation of horror at the change wrought by the lapse of the last three months in the person of her lover. They had parted on the day of the meeting of parliament, when Henry hurried up from Cambridge to meet her at the Tower Stairs, and conduct her to her hotel;—parted, full of hope, and happiness, and health;—and now, there was something in the haggard countenance of her guest, bringing so powerfully to mind the wasted looks of poor Robert Hamilton in his last illness, that Ellen was forced to press her hands stringently upon her

heart and pause for breath, ere she could resume with the Duchess the conversation his arrival had interrupted. Nor was the coherency and composure of Henry improved by gathering from their conversation the name of the noble matron so maternal in her deportment towards his own Ellen; for, common report having apprized him of the passion of Lord Edward Sutton, he fancied he discerned a tone of motherly affection in her Grace's address to Mrs. Hamilton.

Meanwhile the Colonel, to whom the arrival of the new visitor had been duly announced, bustled in with a thousand cordial welcomes for one with whom, notwithstanding his intimacy with the other branches of the family, circumstances had hitherto prevented his becoming acquainted; and, though he had seen Henry only a few minutes the preceding year, in the course of a morning visit in Cavendish Square, he received him more as a son than a stranger. It was impossible for a man of his jocose disposition not to steal one little look at Ellen, to see

how she bore his unexpected arrival ; and a sad disappointment it proved, when, instead of the conscious smiles and “ blushes celestial rosy red” he had anticipated, he found a death-like paleness pervade the countenance of his daughter-in-law, who just then resembled a statue of Niobe rather than a living woman.

In order to afford an opportunity for the young couple to recover themselves and exchange a few happy words of tenderness, Colonel Hamilton was suddenly seized with a violent fit of gallantry towards the Duchess of Elvaston;—insisting upon showing her some volumes of Italian engravings brought over by Ellen, which he had only been able to extricate from the Custom House a few days before.

This had the desired effect. While the Duchess accepted his proposal to examine them more at her ease on a large table near the window, Henry Hamlyn, in an abrupt and agitated manner, approached Mrs. Hamilton. A few whispered sentences served to convey a world of painful intelligence.

“ Thank you heartily for your warning !”

said he, without preamble. “ I appreciate all that is noble and forgiving in your effort on the occasion.—In vain!—My interference has been wholly fruitless! I have seen him. I have remonstrated—pleaded—argued—with the utmost respect, but the utmost warmth; and all, *all* in vain!—He is determined to lose himself!—He, whose independence of mind and uprightness of principle I venerated as those of a demi-god. I could have borne all but *this*, Ellen! The ruin of my earthly happiness was nothing to *this*! I have suffered much. My health is failing—my faculties are broken; and now—. But I am too selfish in vexing you with my afflictions!”—said he, stopping short, when he beheld tears stealing down the marble cheeks of Mrs. Hamilton.—“ I would not leave London, dearest Ellen, without thanking and blessing you!”—

“ Going so soon ?”—faltered Mrs. Hamilton, unprepared for this announcement.

“ What would you have me do ?—I cannot trust myself, dearest, to stay here!—I have not courage to hear my father’s name become

the fable of the clubs,—the scorn of his old friends,—the jest of the newspapers!—As I came hither, just now, I met—. But no matter!—It is not for *you* to take part in my humiliations!—Farewell!”

It was impossible for Mrs. Hamilton to withhold her hand; nor indeed had she voice or self-possession at that moment to hazard an attempt at detaining him.—Colonel Hamilton and the Duchess, however, who were turning over the rustling leaves of Piranesi, for life and death, saw nothing that was going on; and when, roused to attention by the ringing of the bell, touched by Mrs. Hamilton for the door to be opened, the Colonel turned suddenly round to shake the parting hand extended towards him by Henry, he was deterred from the smallest tendency to his habitual explosions of jocularitv, by the expression of anguish only too cruelly delineated in the hollow countenance of his young visitor.

“Where are you going, Harry?”—said he.
“Have you a horse here, or a cab?”—

“ I am going to Knightsbridge,—I am going to see my brother !” was the faltered reply ; and Colonel Hamilton saw that the poor fellow had so much difficulty in giving utterance to even these hurried words, that, with the view of concealing his emotion from the spectacled Duchess, he resumed his task of turning over the leaves as fussily as though the world contained no object of greater interest to him than the ruins of the Capitol or the *contadine* of the Campagna.

“ A younger son, I presume, of Mr. Hamlyn of Dean Park ?” said the Duchess, after his exit. “ Those young people bear a very high character. The young Marchioness of Dartford, that is to be, is very much thought of by all the members of her new family ; and my son Richard, who is in the Life Guards, tells me the eldest son is one of the smartest officers in the Blues.—*This* seems a very gentlemanly young man,—resembling his mother a little, — whom I remember a most pleasing, pretty woman.—In his father’s business, I conclude ? ”

“ At present, only one of the first scholars in the kingdom, and like to be the senior wrangler of his year,” replied the Colonel, proudly. “ But, some day or other, he will be in the bank and in parliament; and then, I venture to predict to your grace that we shall hear news of him !”

Sir Henry Middlebury himself would scarcely have proved a more advantageous interlocutor at that moment than did the good old humdrum Duchess; who, at the word parliament,—(so important a watchword in the ears of all the Suttons !)—found as many questions to ask as would have filled three pages of Pinnock or Mangnall, concerning the prospects of the callow senator,—his principles,—his views,—his education,—his private tutor,—his public,—nay, even his preparatory school.

While poor Ellen was gradually recovering her self-possession sufficiently for the parting compliments about to be required of her, Colonel Hamilton persevered in his negatives and affirmatives; varied only by an occasional

“ I rather think so,”—or “ we shall see !”—and a glance over his shoulder towards the fire-place ; where Ellen, with her face turned towards the looking-glass, was smoothing her raven bandeaux, as a pretext for wiping from her eyes and cheeks the tears which not even *her* energetic fortitude was at that moment able to repress !—

CHAPTER VI.

I would *share* his joys ;
But make his griefs my own,—all, all my own !
SOUTHEY.

Deeply afflicted by the altered appearance of poor Henry, and sympathizing heart and soul in his present anxiety, Mrs. Hamilton felt wholly unable to resume her daily routine of occupations. The Colonel had luckily an appointment at the barracks in the Regent's Park with Lord Richard Sutton ; who, at dinner at the Cossingtons, the preceding day, had insisted upon introducing the old soldier to the riding-school, to his chargers and Irish blood-hounds ; and she was consequently at

leisure to hasten to Cavendish Square, and offer all the comfort in her power to the poor mother, whose anxiety, she conceived, must equal her own.

But, to her surprise and vexation, Mrs. Hamlyn was absent. The approaching marriage of her daughter afforded her a thousand trivial but peremptory occupations ; and Ellen contrived to discover, by cross-questioning Harriet and Miss Creswell, that Henry had not seen his mother since his return from the city ; that they knew nothing of his movements ; and that the whole party were going in the evening to a concert at the house of Lady Vernon.

Nothing could have afforded stronger evidence of the utter ignorance of Mrs. Hamlyn as to the peculiar position of her husband !—She was a woman who at all times occupied herself little with the interests of public life ; and the slightness of sympathy between herself and her husband prevented those natural confidences which must have

rendered the crisis as trying to *her* as to himself. It was too ordinary a circumstance with her to see his brow over-clouded when leaving his home for business in the morning, to create any uneasiness in her mind ; and the interview of remonstrance between him and his son, in Lombard Street, was as yet unknown to her.

Nor was she likely to be enlightened concerning the impending mischief by the rumours of society. The apostacy of Hamlyn from the cause of his City colleagues, was of course unsuspected ; except in a limited circle of parliamentary men, among whom it had been bruited by the connivance of ministers, expressly in the hope of shaking the opposition of others, who, in questions of commercial interest, were apt to be influenced by the opinions of the member for Barsthorpe. By these means, had the report reached the ears of Sir Benjamin Bondwell ; and, through him, struck consternation to the heart of Colonel Hamilton. But the majority of the

House, aware that the question was to be brought before them that night, fully expected to see Richard Hamlyn get up as before; to support with his usual vigour of oratory and extent of information the line of policy he had so long and conscientiously upheld.

That the discovery of his sudden secession, in connection with the report of his approaching ennoblement, would array against him a whole host of exulting enemies, Mrs. Hamilton could not doubt; and sincerely did she regret to find that Lydia and her mother were likely to be startled by intelligence of such a nature, under the roof of persons whom she knew to be their foes. It was more than probable, if the division took place at an early hour, that many members would arrive in Grosvenor Place, open-mouthed from the House, with tidings of the singular self-sacrifice of Hamlyn the banker!—

Address a letter to Mrs. Hamlyn on the subject, she dared not. It is so difficult to allude, in words of a nature to meet the eye of a wife, to any dereliction from honour on the

part of a husband ! Moreover, there was so great a probability that any letter brought by one of Colonel Hamilton's servants to Grosvenor Square might fall into the hands of the banker, that it seemed impossible to hazard a hint upon the subject nearest her heart.

“ After all, *women* are not made responsible for the political delinquencies of their husbands !” said she ; “ and the society of the Vernons is composed of people too well-bred to afford the slightest indication to dear Mrs. Hamlyn of the contempt likely to be provoked by the paltering of this despicable man.”

She had herself agreed to accompany Lady Cossington that night to the Duchess of Elvaston's private box at Covent Garden ; and in the fear of provoking the remarks of the Colonel, if she excused herself, judged it better to enjoy her abstraction *there*, in pretended attention to the play, than remain at home, cultivating her own uneasiness, and exciting that of her father-in-law.

Poor Ellen had, however, for once, nothing to fear from the Colonel's jocularities. So deeply was he affected by a circumstance tending to discredit the man in whom he had placed such implicit confidence and afflict the family he loved best in the world, that so far from indulging in his usual pleasantries, or enjoying, as was his wont, a good play seen from a good box, he remained as still and silent as Ellen herself, till the entrance of Lord Cossington towards the end of the after-piece.

"I thought there was a division to-night?" said his wife, whom he had forewarned not to expect him.

"There is! But to my great surprise, I am not wanted, and have paired off. We have it hollow to-night!—Thanks to an admirable speech from Hamlyn, the banker, ministers will carry it triumphantly."

And forthwith they began discussing the performance. For there was nothing to surprise Lady Cossington in her husband's announcement. She knew that Hamlyn was

of their party, on many occasions an able supporter of Government ; and it was only natural that he should make an able speech in favour of a ministerial measure. Colonel Hamilton knew better than to provoke explanations by a single inquiry ; and Ellen was, consequently, secure from the cutting remarks she had so much apprehended. She was among people for whom the moneyed interests of the country constituted no especial interest, and for whom a ministerial triumph was all in all. She only trusted that Lydia and her mother might be safe among those equally circumscribed in their sympathies.

Next morning, the Hamiltons woke with that vague sense of disquietude and trouble, which arises from the backslidings of a friend. Neither of them chose to refer, as they sat at breakfast, to the subject which occupied the thoughts of both ; and as the newspaper lying on the table was the leading ministerial journal, it adverted to the debate of the night before, as chiefly remarkable for the powerfully argumentative speech of the Honourable

Member for Barsthorpe; complimenting the ministry and the country on his recently enlightened views, and remarking that it was not possible for a man of such strong understanding and consistent principles to remain permanently opposed to a measure tending to the tranquillisation of the public mind, and securing a vested right of the most sacred nature and importance.

It was useless, therefore, to refer to such an organ, for any indication of the state of public opinion towards Hamlyn; and Ellen respected the feelings of her companion too much, to propose sending for an opposition paper, to ascertain how the matter was regarded in more liberal quarters.

“ I don’t much like going to Cavendish Square to-day !” said the Colonel, as they rose from the breakfast-table. “ Did I understand you right, my dear Nelly, that Harry was going out of town again ?—Doesn’t he mean to dine with me ?—doesn’t he mean to—”

“ I know no more than yourself !” replied Mrs. Hamilton, in a faint voice. “ He ap-

peared yesterday to be in a state bordering on distraction. All that *we* regret in his father's proceedings, is to *him* a source of far bitterer mortification."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!"—interrupted the Colonel, in his turn. "A noble heart, I take it,—a high-toned mind,—too good by half for a banker. Nelly! we *must* say or do something to comfort him.—Sit down and write him a bit of a note. —Persuade him to dine with us to-day."

"Any demonstration of kindness on *my* part, dearest sir, would only aggravate the evil!"—replied Mrs. Hamilton, deeply touched by the affectionate tone of the old man. "Better leave him to himself! Nevertheless, I own I am most anxious for news of his movements. If, therefore, you dislike going to Cavendish Square (where, however, at this time of day you would be secure from meeting Mr. Hamlyn) could you not call upon his son at Knightsbridge; or upon Lord Dartford, or—"

"Can I speak with you a minute, sir?"

interrupted the voice of Johnston, who, just then, half-opened the door.

“Come in—come in!—No one here but Mrs. Hamilton.—Come in, Johnston!”—cried the Colonel, almost angry at a hesitation which he attributed to punctilio established as a matter of etiquette by the waiters of the hotel. Still, however, the man hung back; even after his master had pettishly inquired what the deuce he was afraid of.

“I wished, Colonel, to have a moment’s conversation with you!” said he, forced at length to enter the room; and Mrs. Hamilton was astonished to perceive that the face of the gray-headed servant was blanched almost to the ghastliness exhibited by that of Henry Hamlyn the day before. In a moment, it occurred to her agonized heart that some mischance had befallen the object of her affections!—

“Johnston!” said she, assuming a tone of firmness sorely belied by the tremor pervading her whole frame, — “*pray* speak out!—Do not be afraid of alarming *me*. I

see how it is ! You have bad news to communicate from Cavendish Square !"—

" I have, indeed, ma'am," said he, almost sobbing. " Sad news,—sad news !—though I'm sure I don't know how the report should have reached you already ! — For the man who brought the account ran all the way, — and is now breathless in the hall."

" What the deuce are you all talking about ?"—cried the Colonel, becoming alarmed, yet angry with them and himself for his own agitation.— "*What* news ?—*What* man ?—What's happened ?—Speak out !"—

" He is not dead, sir, as was at first apprehended !"—replied Johnston, little suspecting the anguish which his inexplicitness was inflicting upon his young lady. — " The surgeon who was with him in the coach had done no more than stanch the blood,—so he could not by any means say the case was hopeless."

" Of whom *are* you talking ?"—persisted Colonel Hamilton, himself sickened by the agony of suspense ; while Ellen fixed her eyes inquiringly on Johnston, totally incapable

of pronouncing a syllable in elucidation of her fears.

“ Of Mr. Hamlyn, sir ! who has been desperately wounded in a duel. Mrs. Hamlyn, as soon as she could be made to understand what had happened, desired you might be instantly sent for.”

“ Why the deuce didn’t you say so at first ? Let the carriage come round, or stay,—no !—call a cab !—I don’t know what I’m thinking of, or saying.—My hat, Johnston !—Ellen ! my poor child,—I see by the joyful expression of your countenance for how dreadful a blow you had prepared yourself ! But ’tis bad enough as ’tis. Poor Hamlyn ! the father of such a family ! Coming with me ?—That’s well !—I should have scarcely found courage for the scene, Nelly, unless you were by my side.”

The information gradually, slowly, and sadly acquired by Colonel Hamilton in explanation of this afflicting summons, may as well be succinctly related to the reader. The *Morning Post*, while communicating in so good

a spirit to the public the conversion of Mr. Hamlyn to the financial tenets of government, had considerably forbore to notice the grievous interruptions, hootings, howlings, bellowings, crowings, experienced by the member for Bars-thorpe, in the course of a speech, which, had it been the result of conviction and good faith, was citable as a splendid effort of oratory. From the moment of driving his "filthy bargain," or rather of being driven into it, Hamlyn had been intent on the concoction of this effort of sophistry. Confiding, and with reason, in his own powers of dissimulation, he trusted to give to his act of treachery an air of conviction, recantation, repentance, and atonement ; and entertained little doubt that the energy of his eloquence would recruit to his banner a portion at least of the habitual opponents of government.

Great, therefore, was his disappointment when, for the first time in his political career, he experienced the greatest difficulty in making himself heard. He had of course taken precautions that the smallest syllable of his dis-

course (which might have been aptly named "Hamlyn's Apology,") should reach the ears, or rather the pens of the reporters, to ensure having justice done him on the morrow by the ministerial organs. Still, it was deeply humiliating to one accustomed to be listened to on questions of magnitude in that house, amid a silence which enabled him to hear a pin drop, to be assailed with outcries of so indecent a description as now met his ears. It was in fact a *charivari*, — accomplished by assailants of the highest class and credit.

Nevertheless, he bore the attack in a manner very different from what might have been predicted of the member for Barsthorpe who, in earlier years, had been twice placed in the custody of the Serjeant of the House. The baited bull neither tore up the ground under his feet, nor turned upon the foes who were hounding him into madness. Either his habitual hypocrisy enabled him to control all show of emotion; or he was overwhelmed by consciousness of his degrading predicament.

His speech was correctly given, but it had evidently been learned by rote; and was recited as an oration of Demosthenes may have been, after his practice in presence of the roaring surges. No warmth; — none of that nervous energy which must unite with logical deductions to form the perfect orator. His voice was now as passionless as habitually his countenance. With many present, his argumentative and self-sacrificing speech did but borrow new force from this stern immobility; resembling that of an antique statue of some sage of the schools, rather than the irritable energumen of modern parliaments. But his enemies thought otherwise. His enemies decided that Samson was shorn of his strength, — that Hamlyn's sun was set. —

Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires !

was the exhortation of the honourable member for Alverstoke, (one of the wits of the house,) to the Whig member who was to reply to the new mouthpiece of government; and

either following this advice or his own devices, the sarcastic orator proceeded to attack the apostate, with a discharge of puny but poisoned arrows, which left him prostrate, like Gulliver martyred by Lilliputian darts.

A coarse apostrophe from Sir Benjamin Bondwell was still harder to be borne. The party spokesman had attacked a government measure, supported by the honourable member for Barsthorpe. The banker attacked his brother banker; — openly, strongly, advisedly; describing the city as betrayed by one of its most favoured sons, — and ending with — “I am very grieved for thee, Jonathan, my brother.”

All this was passively endured by Richard Hamlyn. Having screwed his courage to the sticking-place, he maintained his usual attitude in the house; conversing freely with one or two Government men, to whom Lord Crawley had given their cue. Already, the flattering unction of administrative thanks had been laid to his soul. For whatever feelings his speech might have excited against

himself, it had gained to the measure under his advocacy double the number of proselytes upon which they had reckoned ; and a Ministry cares about as much for the sufferings of its implements, as a General for the life of the soldier he deutes to a forlorn hope !—

At length, encouraged by his apparent tameness, the wit already referred to as stimulating the malice of others, ventured to rise on his own account. After a humorous comparison of the Honourable Member for Barsthorpe to the thief who bit off his mother's ear at the foot of the gallows, he hazarded so pointed an allusion to the rumoured elevation of Mr. Hamlyn to the peerage in reward for the sudden falling of the scales from his eyes at the prophetic touch of the first lord of the Treasury, that a general cry of " Order !" and " Shame !" deadened the force of Hamlyn's spirited and eloquent refutation.

Fortunately for him, they had hit the *invulnerable* heel ; and he was consequently enabled to defend himself in a style of indignation, which brought down the cheers of the

House,—always generously susceptible to an injustice; and served still further the purposes of Government by the popularization of the measure in the person of its advocate.

But the cheers of the House expire in the lobby! *There*, the member becomes the man again; and when, after a triumphant division, Richard Hamlyn hurried through the throng, he found himself contemplated by many with coldness, by some with undisguised contempt; while the stammered and awkward compliments of such of his parliamentary colleagues as had no personal interest in the question, evinced more plainly than all the rest that what might be considered a triumph had better have been a failure!—

His patience was now oozing from his spirit, drop by drop. As the excitement of a man under the influence of wine is stimulated by contact with the open air, in proportion as Hamlyn re-approached the common routine of life and left behind him the factitious atmosphere of parliament, where insult is *not* insult,

or derision mockery, he became infuriated by the sense of his mortifications ; as a man grows suddenly conscious of his bruises, a certain time after a fall.

Just as he had been wounded to the quick by a civilly ceremonious bow from a man with whom he was accustomed to exchange familiar nods, Alberic Vernon passed him, laughing immoderately ; arm and arm with the wicked wit by whom the question of the Scrip peerage had been so indiscreetly broached. That he was the subject of their merriment, he could entertain no doubt ; nor did he hesitate to damp the insolent mirth indulged at his expense, by instantly accosting them, and demanding from the Honourable Member for Alverstoke his authority for the report of his intended elevation to the peerage.

Alberic Vernon, to whom the officious Squire of Dean Park had been rendered an object of contempt by the insolence of his parents, but who now loathed him as the father of the man reported to be betrothed to the beautiful woman by whom he had been

ignominiously rejected, was far from regretting this occasion for a public retort.

“He heard it from *me*, sir!” said he, fiercely. “The fact was stated at my father’s table, by one of your intimate friends, whose name you will excuse me from mentioning, as I am happy to say that it is not the custom of *the Vernon family* to betray their associates.”

Hamlyn was furious. The two insolent boys before him were inflamed with all the valour of Bellamy’s hottest tumblers; while *he* was influenced by the still stronger stimulus of cold and deadly enmity against his kind,—the friends who had abandoned him, the foes who had clamoured over his fall;—and when the companion of Alberic Vernon, vexed at finding his weapon of offence snatched from his hand, persisted in his raillery, such words were in a moment exchanged between them as rendered explanations of a more deadly kind imminently indispensable.

It was past midnight. The dispute had occurred in so public a place, that there could

be little doubt of such interference between the parties, as uniformly protects and justifies the blustering of modern senators (who, like heralds of old, and Macbeth in modern times, bear a charmed life !) unless a hostile meeting could be arranged before the quarrel got wind.

“ We must forestall the newspapers ! ” was the first remark of Alberic Vernon, as the “ friend ” of the honourable member for Alverstoke ; and the individual whom Hamlyn had sought in haste in the coffee-room, as at once an obsequious ally of government and too heavily indebted to his firm to refuse assistance, instantly repaired with Vernon to the Travellers, to arrange the preliminaries for a meeting the following morning, at eight o'clock, in Battersea Fields.

When Hamlyn reached home, the excitement produced by this disastrous succession of events was still whirring in his brain and gnawing his heart's core. Fortunately, the family was at rest. Mrs. Hamlyn had appeared at Lady Vernon's concert only in

obedience to his orders; and, having been harassed by the pertinacious interrogations of Sir Henry Middlebury, (who, knowing few people in the room, had attached himself to her side, not only to offer his congratulations and inquire the names of all the performers and the various schools of art in which they had received their musical education, but the counties in which the Marquis of Dartford's estates were situated and the connections of his family,) had hastened to her pillow; and Hamlyn, dismissing the footman who usually sat up for him, with express instructions that Ramsay should bring him his shaving-water at a quarter to seven in the morning, was left the only person waking in the house;—alone, with the tremendous consciousness that it was perhaps the last night he might ever pass under its roof!—Not that *his* soul was easily depressed by desponding presentiments; and his irritation not having yet subsided, the preponderating feeling in his heart was to pursue,—retaliate,—exterminate!

The banker had forgotten that HE who assumes to himself the privilege of Vengeance might exterminate in his turn !—Moreover, the leading characteristic of Hamlyn's mind was at all times its sanguine self-reliance. Like most people who put not their trust in Providence,—like most people reliant on the intervention of Chance,—it cost him little more to expect miracles from its operation, than trifles. Half of the errors of his life arose from this rash confidence. All he had misappropriated of the property of his clients, he *firmly expected* to replace. He was fully persuaded that some happy combination of luck would enable him to repair the disorder he had created. And now, with a duel on his hands,—a duel with a young and adroit antagonist, — a duel in which public feeling, if not the cause of justice, would be wholly on the adverse side,—he confidently expected to despatch his business in Battersea Fields as coolly, methodically, and triumphantly, as his business on the Stock Exchange !—

His utmost efforts, therefore, towards “ set-

ting his house in order" consisted in addressing a few lines to Spilsby, with instructions on certain points of business to be despatched on the morrow, in case he was unable to reach Lombard Street at an early hour; which he determined to forward into the city by the same conveyance that took him to the residence of his second, the Honourable Colonel Frampton, who had promised to drive him to the ground.

He next committed to the flames a few papers from his bureau, which were not calculated for the scrutiny of his family in case he should meet with mischance, and have to resign his keys to the keeping of his wife. The bloodless nature of most duels arising out of parliamentary squabbles, seemed to ensure him against any thing *beyond* this. On recalling to mind the various hostile meetings which had occurred for the last twenty years, under similar provocation, he could not remember *one* in which the interference of seconds had not been of the most exemplary nature.

Nevertheless, as his excitement subsided,

and his thirst for vengeance grew slack under the influence of anxiety touching the unfavourable impression the administration of a severe lesson to his antagonist might produce on his reputation as a man of business, his spirits became somewhat depressed. Ere he retired to the small bedroom which, for some years past, he had occupied, on the plea of the disturbance his early hours created to Mrs. Hamlyn, he entered the drawing-room, now cold, silent, deserted, and imperfectly lighted by the single wax-taper he carried in his hand. The air was fragrant with the fine exotics adorning the flower-stands ; and the light, dim as it was, of the taper he held, fell upon a thousand gorgeous objects ; — magnificent vases, marble tables, entablatures of malachite and coral, and all the splendid luxury of *pietra dura* and *marqueterie*.

He seemed to notice, for the first time, the downy softness of the rich Aubusson carpet under his feet ; the glitter of the splendid lustres over his head. Like the Cardinal de

Richelieu, when discovered by his secretary early one morning a few weeks previous to his decease, taking a solitary leave of the beloved pictures and exquisite statues of his gallery, the eyes of the banker lingered tenderly upon the gaudy objects, for the enjoyment and display of which he had perilled the credit of an honest name, and the peace and welfare of hundreds of confiding victims!

At length, just as he was on the point of receding with noiseless steps from the room over which slept his gentle wife and the happy daughter whose dreams were at that moment roseate with the brightest hues of youthful love, the light he held fell upon the gaudy frame of a large picture, to which, for some years past, his eyes had never once been directed; and, for some minutes, they were now riveted upon it, as by a master spell.

It was a portrait,—a full-length portrait from the pencil of Lawrence; representing Mrs. Hamlyn—no! not Mrs. Hamlyn—*Sophia*, at the climax of her youthful loveliness, a year

after her marriage, with her first-born resting on her knee. The picture had been begun at his father's suggestion, while the young bride was yet an idol at Dean Park ; the child being added during the slow completion of the portrait, as an after-thought of his own. In himself, one of the loveliest infants ever seen, little Walter derived new beauties from the graceful pencil of the artist ; and well did Hamlyn remember how fondly he had assisted in keeping the child quiet during the tedious task of sitting, by holding before his little laughing eyes the very toy which, in the picture before him, figured in the hand of the smiling, exulting mother. — The force of association brought back with lifelike force to the banker's mind the soft, warm grasp of those dimpled baby hands. Yet, at that moment, his own were cold as death, and hard with the clench of suppressed emotion !—

From the soft and sinuous outline of the half-naked babe, the eyes of Hamlyn wandered to the face of the mother. But could those clustering curls, — those sparkling eyes, — those

blooming cheeks, ever have been the features of his wife? — Where was that woman gone? — What had become of her? — She *could* not have lapsed into the pale, sad, silent, spiritless being who sat by his household board — she *could* not have progressed into the suffering mother who bore her cross so meekly! — For a moment, Sophia Harrington as he had first beheld her, — joyous, brilliant, beautiful, beloved, — recurred to his mind; and in reflecting on the transformation his conduct had effected, so heavy a sigh arose from the depths of his soul, that he had ample need to recur anew for consolation to the face of that beloved son, whose mature years fulfilled all the promise of their youthful grace. The passionate joy with which he had hailed the birth of his first-born, seemed to have prolonged its influence even until now, with a rapture unsusceptible of decay.

“ I should like to have shaken hands again with Walter!” was his closing reflection, as he quitted the room and slowly ascended the stairs. “ In these cases, one never knows

what may happen. — I should like to have shaken hands first with Walter.”—

Next morning, it excited no surprise among his servants that their ever-active master should be astir an hour earlier than usual. For a moment, indeed, it struck Ramsay as extraordinary that Mr. Hamlyn should say he did not choose to wait for his cabriolet (which he pretended to have forgotten to order overnight;) but that, being in a hurry, he would walk to the nearest coach-stand. Nay, even had the butler surmised that his master was going out to fight a duel, so convinced was he of the propriety and decorum of every measure of Mr. Hamlyn, that he would have felt persuaded some new canon of the law had, unknown to himself, authorised and legalised such a breach of the peace.

Before noon, however, he was suddenly summoned to assist in removing the wounded man to his chamber; and the first to propose sending for Colonel Hamilton, as well as to the sons of his unfortunate master.

Such was the state of affairs when the vete-

ran reached Cavendish Square. The surgeon who had accompanied Hamlyn home in the carriage from Battersea, had never left his side; and Keate and Brodie were every moment expected. But neither Mrs. Hamlyn nor his daughter had been yet permitted to see him. From the bewildered looks of the former, Colonel Hamilton saw, at once, that *she* at least entertained no hope; and, having entreated Ellen to remain with her friend in the drawing-room, to which they were sentenced during the examination of the wound, he hurried with anxious but faltering steps to the chamber of the wounded man.

Carefully as he turned the handle of the bed-room door, Hamlyn, who was lying on the bed half undressed, his coat being off, and his shirt stained with blood, was roused by the sound; and, without unclosing his eyes, made the same inquiry which had already three times before escaped his lips—"Is that Walter?"—

"Captain Hamlyn was out on a field-day, sir, when John reached the barracks," whis-

pered Ramsay, who, with his usually rubicund face, as pale as death, was supporting his master.

While he was yet speaking, Colonel Hamilton approached the bedside, and gently pressed the hand extended beside the sufferer. Conscious that this tender touch was of a very different nature from the professional handling of the surgeon, Hamlyn slowly unclosed his eyes ; and, on recognizing the Colonel, attempted a faint smile.

“ This is sad boy’s play for a man of my years,” said he, in a feeble voice. “ But it was inevitable ! It was none of my seeking.”

Perceiving the surgeon shake his head reprovingly at this attempt to speak on the part of his patient, already exhausted by loss of blood, Colonel Hamilton placed his finger on his lips. Tears were coursing each other down his cheeks. He had seen hundreds,—thousands,—slain in battle. But it happened that this was the first time he had beheld a man of peace slain by the hand of a fellow-citizen. The instincts of his manly heart shrunk from the sight, as from that of assassination.

“Has Mr. Henry left town?” he inquired, in a low voice of Ramsay, as Hamlyn again re-closed his eyes; and the butler’s sign in the affirmative proved a sad disappointment. Convinced that Hamlyn was rapidly breathing his last, he thought it hard that neither of his sons should be present, to receive his parting instructions, and dying breath.

“So died my poor boys!” was his involuntary reflection. “Neither kith nor kin at hand to close their eyes! But it is cruel indeed upon poor Hamlyn!”

At that moment, a carriage stopped at the door; and though the sound was scarcely noticed by the persons present, the wounded man again, and with still greater effort, renewed his inquiry of—“Is it my son Walter?”

“Since you are anxious, I will go as quick as possible to the barracks, and follow the directions I receive till I find him, and bring him back!”—whispered the Colonel, bending over him, and, on receiving a grateful word of assent, hastening to quit the room. On the stairs he encountered Keate and a stranger;

and having hurriedly acquainted him of the state of the case, returned for a moment into the drawing-room, not, however, to comfort its anxiously expecting inmates. The expression of his countenance sufficiently apprized them that *he* at least was without hope.

“ Has any one sent for Harry ? ”—said he to Lydia, perceiving that her mother was incapable of understanding or replying to the question ; and, on being answered in the negative, Colonel Hamilton rapidly arranged with his daughter-in-law, that, while he proceeded to Knightsbridge, *she* should despatch Johnston to Dean Park, that the news of the fatal event might be communicated with due reserve to the member of the family least capable of supporting the shock. A few lines from Ellen were to intreat his instant return to town.

“ Poor Hamlyn,—poor Hamlyn ! ”—murmured Colonel Hamilton, when, (after learning at the barracks that, for want of authority, no message had yet been despatched to Wormholt Scrubbs after his master,) he took

possession of Walter's horse and cab, and authorized the groom to exercise to the utmost the speed of the finest stepper in London. "In the possession of all that renders life desirable!—Rich, healthy, happy, active, useful!—A quarrel at the House of Commons, they say. Ah! I feared no good would follow those cursed reports I heard t'other day at Launchington's. May be, however, they belied him!—God grant it!—'Tis hard enough to lose a friend;—harder still to lose one's respect for his memory.—But how—*how* am I to break this afflicting news to Walter and Dartford?"—

The task was indeed a trying one. He found them in the animated exercise of their professional duties,—those two brilliant and promising young men, and at the first moment, almost inclined to be vexed at his unexpected intrusion on the ground. Nevertheless, the sight of his fine horse in a foam, and Colonel Hamilton pale and speechless, soon convinced Walter that something was sorely amiss.

In a few seconds, he had taken the groom's

place in the cabriolet, and was galloping his horse back to town at a still more frantic rate ; while Lord Dartford, though for a moment relieved, even to joy, by learning that the family disaster regarded not the being dearest to him in the world, hastened to obtain from his commanding officer a remission for Walter and himself from their duties of the day, and was soon following them at a distance on his charger, at the utmost speed compatible with the field-day accoutrements.

CHAPTER VII.

I do but hide

Under these words, like embers, every spark
Of that which has consumed me. Quick and dark
The grave is yawning. As its roof shall cover
My limbs with dust and worms, under and over ;
So let oblivion hide this grief.

SHELLEY.

By the mercy of Heaven, Walter Hamlyn arrived in Cavendish Square in time to comfort and support his father by his presence during the painful operation of the extraction of the ball, which had been deferred till after the arrival of the second surgeon. Dashing through the crowd assembled as usual at the door, in aggravation of family afflictions, he

had scarcely a moment to disencumber himself of his uniform and throw on a dressing-gown, in time to hang over the bed and stifle in his bosom the groans of his father during the agonizing operation, in which it was feared his strength might fail.

But the spell had already taken effect. While preparing himself for the effort, Hamlyn's eyes had encountered the form of his son, (Walter, the grandson of old Walter Hamlyn) and feeling he had yet something to live for,—something to cherish him, even though exposed to worldly obloquy, he seemed to rally his courage; and the Battersea surgeon, whose finger was continually on his wrist, announced a sensible improvement in the state of the pulse. The simple words, “ My dear, *dear* father!” whispered by the voice of Walter, had conveyed volumes of exhortation and worlds of hope.

By the time the patient was relieved from his agony, and his son from the almost equal torture of witnessing it, by the time the two eminent surgeons had taken leave, leaving the

original attendant to watch over the results of the assistance they had rendered, the afternoon was far advanced. At present, it was impossible to surmise the extent of the shock the system of the sufferer might have sustained. But it was much that he was still alive. The evening would show, by the usual accession of fever, how far the constitution was affected. Meanwhile, perfect quiet, and, if possible, sleep, was to be prayed for. Opiates had been already administered,—straw was laid down before the house,—the knocker removed,—the bell muffled;—and a policeman stationed at the adjoining door to entreat the forbearance of inquirers. The answer given to their anxious interrogation was the bulletin of the surgeons that “Mr. Hamlyn’s situation was precarious; but that he was going on as favourably as could be expected.”

These wise precautions had not, however, prevented a rumour of his death from getting into circulation in the metropolis; and from thence, of course, reaching the provinces, so as to produce a precautionary meeting, on the

morrow of the worthy and independent electors of Barsthorpe. The evening papers, nay, even a second edition of one or two morning ones, contained a most detailed and elaborate account of the duel, representing (of course according to the politics of the divers journals) the banker as a victim, and his antagonist as an assassin ; or the challenger as a rash and intemperate man, and the Honourable Member for Alverstoke as a reluctant self-defender. In both accounts, facts were distorted, descriptions overcharged, and words attributed to both parties which had neither escaped their lips, nor were likely to escape the lips of men in their situation of life ; and to one of these penny-a-lineations, in addition to a picturesque description of the mill near which the “ fatal meeting ” had taken place, a paragraph headed, “ LATEST PARTICULARS,” announced that “ within the last quarter of an hour Mr. Hamlyn had breathed his last ; ” probably as an excuse for lengthening the paragraph by an account of the maiden name of the amiable and accomplished lady he had

left to lament his loss, and the number of children who were the fruit of their union.

While, therefore, Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughters were seated in breathless anxiety in the drawing-room in Cavendish Square, listening every time the slightest movement in the chamber overhead gave indication that the factitious slumbers of the wounded man were broken, while Lord Dartford, to satisfy the anxieties of Lydia, proceeded every quarter of an hour to the bed-room door to ascertain that all was proceeding favourably, and Walter still watching by the bed-side,—the clubs of the West-end were deciding *who* was to fill the vacant seat for Barsthorpe; and whether the Honourable Member for Alverstoke and Alberic Vernon would have to surrender, in order to stand their trial, thus producing the loss of a couple of votes to the Opposition. Such was the most interesting side of the fatal event to that idle, chattering class of London life, to whom the collision of heaven and earth were important only as affording matter for “news!”—

At present, of course, public sympathy rested with Hamlyn. . It was quite clear that, whoever might be the aggressor, the dead man was most to be pitied. All who had heard him speak the preceding night, felt privileged to be peculiarly horror-struck. Those who had seen the carriages of Keate and Brodie drive to the door in Cavendish Square, having an anecdote to relate connected with the event of the day, were, for a moment, objects of interest; while even common inquirers after the family who had actually seen the bulletin acquired temporary importance.

It was precisely the sort of incident to set the West End in a ferment; more especially at so unengaged a period of the season.—The Hamlyns were, in every way, objects of interest.—The approaching marriage of the beautiful daughter, the university distinctions of the gifted son, the popularity of the handsome Walter, were enhancements of the publicity usually connected with a banker and member of Parliament; and the peculiar circumstances connected, and still more pecu-

liar ones *said* to be connected, with Hamlyn's recent conversion to orthodoxy in political economy, served only to add new vigour to the countless tongues of Rumour already in motion.

By dinner-time, Flimflam, who had gone the round of the clubs to which he belonged, in order to gather "exclusive information," and "original anecdotes" connected with the duel, for the recreation of a party he was to join at the house of a high legal functionary, found his memory so overcharged with contradictory accounts, all related on "undeniable authority," that it almost required a mnemonic process to convey them so far as the Rolls House, in Chancery Lane. The only point on which the world was unanimous was one always insisted upon when duels prove fatal; namely, that the meeting *ought* to have been prevented, either by the seconds, or the police. The quarrel had been public, the provocation generally recognized as sure to provoke a hostile explanation. Every man in London consequently decided that all pre-

sent at the affray ought to be indicted for murder; though, had every man in London been implicated the following day in a similar affair, not one of them would have stirred his little finger in obstruction of a similar result. Nay, had the prudence of the parties suggested an accommodation, nine in ten would afterwards have decided that they *ought* to have met; and tried to pick a hole in their character for courage, on the strength of their forbearance.

But while White's and Brookes's were lying and slandering in the levity of their hearts, while eating their oyster *pâtés* and waiting for their cutlets, far deeper mischief was produced in a quarter of the town where reports have a market value, and a fortune is sometimes realized by a dexterous fabrication.

Though the non-appearance of Mr. Hamlyn at the banking-house, at his usual time, had produced no anxiety, thanks to the plausible explanation he had taken the precaution of forwarding to Spilsby,—by the middle of

the day, tidings reached the city that the body of Hamlyn the banker had been brought home to his house in Cavendish Square ; some said by a policeman, others, by a surgeon who had vainly attempted to restore animation to the corpse. To this positive announcement succeeded a rumour, arising as rumours do,—none can tell how,—connecting the event with the fatal word SUICIDE ! It was reported on Change that the unfortunate banker had perished by his own hand ; and whereas, in the city, one only cause suggests itself to sicken a man of life — *viz.* a scarcity of money,—though it could not be added to the report (as is usual in such cases,) that the policeman had found only a few halfpence in the waistcoat-pocket of the self-murderer,—it was confidently stated that the rash act of the banker was produced by the hopeless derangement of his affairs !—

It was luckily past three o'clock, before this fatal tale got wind ; for within a few minutes afterwards, the doors in Lombard Street were besieged by a far denser crowd

of claimants, than those in Cavendish Square of obliging inquirers. The answer of the clerks to such as pressed for particulars of Mr. Hamlyn's death "was that they had received a communication from him some hours before, in his own handwriting; and that the messenger they had despatched for information to the West End half an hour before was not yet returned." Their answer to those who pressed for the payment of their balance was prompt compliance; and it was fortunate that the remittance that very morning of the debt of Schreiber and Co. placed them out of any immediate anxiety from the absence of their principal during a run upon the house.

Before Spilsby had found time to become really alarmed, the usual hour for closing arrived, and the last thing done to appease the anxiety of those who were hurrying too late to the door, was to exhibit a bulletin, stating that Mr. Hamlyn had been wounded in a duel arising out of differences the preceding night in the House of Commons, but was going on as favourably as possible.

But though this authorized contradiction of the report of his death had all the good effect anticipated by Spilsby, the devisor of the measure, it was impossible to say what sort of feeling, or even what sort of contingencies, might arise next morning previous to opening the bank. At all events, the head clerk, to whom the private business of the house was so inadequately known, did not choose to take upon himself any further responsibility; and he accordingly despatched an express to Mr. Bernard Hamlyn, who was at his seat in Suffolk, unluckily out of the line of railroad communication; and as soon as the correspondence of the house was closed for the evening, and, in the absence of the acting partner, the keys delivered to himself, he proceeded to Cavendish Square, to ascertain the exact state of Mr. Hamlyn, and take the instructions of his representatives.

But this was no easy matter. In the first instance, he was denied access to the house; orders to prevent all disturbance or noise having been strictly issued. But the John

to whom he had applied for admittance to Mr. Hamlyn the preceding week, having luckily recognized his person, prevented his dismissal by the police, and insured his ingress. Once within the hall, all seemed secure ! But to whom was he now to address himself ?—One of Mr. Hamlyn's sons was in the country,—the other in close attendance on the dying man !—Even Ramsay had not a moment quitted the sick room since the operation. With respect to the banker's wife and daughters, even if the footman could have been prevailed upon to disturb them, of what avail their interference ?—

By good luck, the footman with whom the clerk was in communication was not only gratefully attached to his master, but by frequent attendance on Mr. Hamlyn to the House, and gossiping with the servants of other men of business, had imbibed some notion of the consequence of a banker's calling. *He* perfectly understood his master's life to be of more consequence to the community than that of a Lord Edward Sutton ;

and, having allowed Spilsby to station himself in the dining-room, promised to acquaint him the moment an interview was possible with Captain Hamlyn or the Marquis of Dartford!

“Colonel Hamilton has only this moment left the house!” said John;—“’tis a thousand pities but you had spoken with Colonel Hamilton!”—an opinion in which Spilsby so strongly coincided, that when, half an hour afterwards, the good old man hurried back again (having been home only to make inquiries concerning Johnston’s departure or arrival, and give orders in behalf of Ellen, who would not, even for a moment, leave Mrs. Hamlyn), before he made his appearance in the drawing-room, an interview was claimed by the clerk.

“Keate saw poor Hamlyn an hour ago, and decides him to be going on as favourably as possible!” said Colonel Hamilton, concluding that the anxiety depicted on the face of the bald-headed clerk proceeded solely from the suffering and precarious condition of his employer.

“I am heartily glad to hear it, sir!” replied Spilsby. “Mr. Hamlyn has been a good friend to *me*, and has my best wishes for his recovery. But I am exceedingly anxious, in the interim, to receive instructions from the family. The responsibility of so considerable a business as Mr. Hamlyn’s must not be left upon my hands. I scarcely occupy even a confidential situation in the firm, and am quite at a loss.”

“Not more so, I take it, than either of his sons would be!” cried the Colonel, shrugging his shoulders.—“By George! poor Hamlyn was right! It was essential that one of those boys should be prepared to succeed him in his business. But who could foresee all that has happened?”

“The fatal event of this morning, sir,” resumed Spilsby, “has occasioned a most unexpected run upon the house. In the interval before opening to-morrow, confidence *may* be in some degree restored by the discovery that the report of Mr. Hamlyn’s suicide was a libel,—and even of his death, pre-

mature. But it is impossible to guess! A run upon a banking-house, once begun, proceeds like the conflagration of a house, as if stimulated by every new attempt to arrest its progress. I own I tremble for the result!"

"Tremble for the result of *what?*"—cried the Colonel—fancying that, in the house of death, no interest could prevail over that of the danger of the sufferer. "Why can't you speak plain,—and speak out?"—

"I mean, sir,"—resumed Spilsby, scarcely knowing whether he dared consider the Colonel in any other light than an important constituent, to be alarmed by the announcement,—“I mean that, should the pressure continue, we are unprepared to meet it without advice or assistance from one of the partners.”

"What!—forced to suspend your payments?" exclaimed the astonished old man. "Gad!—this must be looked to immediately!—This is a disastrous consequence of poor Hamlyn's disablement which I own I had not thought of! I'm expecting young Hamlyn (my friend's

second son,—the one who's intended for the firm) in town every minute. I'll confer with *him*. If possible, I'll take an opportunity of asking a word of instruction, in the course of the night, from Hamlyn himself.—At what o'clock do you open?"—

"At nine, sir."

"Can you be here at seven?"

"Certainly. But if I could possibly receive your instructions to-night—"

"Come back, then, at twelve!" said Colonel Hamilton. "By that time, I shall have seen Harry Hamlyn, and taken his opinion on the matter."

But when midnight and the bald-headed clerk arrived together, no progress had been made,—no Henry Hamlyn been heard of! On reaching Rugby, Johnston had ascertained from Jacob Durdan, who was waiting for the up-train and had been at Dean Park in the morning for tidings of the family, that Mr. Henry was neither there, nor expected; and at the station, where Henry Hamlyn's person was well known, it was stated that he had not

returned from his visit to town. To save time, therefore, instead of cutting across the country to Ovington, at the loss of several hours, Johnston returned straight to London, bringing back the unopened letter of Mrs. Hamilton.

This was sore news to the Colonel,—astounding news to the clerk!—

“I’m so poor a hand at business,” said the former to Spilsby, “that I scarcely know how to advise, without the risk of doing mischief. But since matters are serious as you say, I recommend you to call together the friends of the house. Hamlyn’s solicitors, Wigwell and Slack,—Mrs. Hamlyn’s brothers, the two Harringtons (they’re no great friends, I fancy, with her husband,—but as her trustees, they’re forced to look to their sister’s interests),—besides any business friends of whom you’ve more cognizance than *I* have,—should meet at the banking-house by day-break to-morrow. *I* will be there myself, as the friend of the boys; and, late as it is, those gentlemen should be apprized to-night,

The matter is too momentous to be trifled with !”

“ I will hurry down instantly, sir, to Wigwell,” said the clerk, who had a cab in waiting. “ He keeps early hours, and will be retired to rest. But luckily, he lives at his house of business ; and I can leave a note, apprizing him of your desire. I will also proceed to Mr. Andrew Harrington’s, in Bedford Square, who is somewhere about the best adviser in London we could have, in such a strait, besides being one of our largest capitalists. If you can oblige me with writing-materials, Colonel Hamilton, I will provide myself *here* with a letter to Wigwell and Slack, in case I am unable to see one of the partners to-night.”

This important business despatched, and with it the clerk whose communications had added such thorny anxieties to the previous calamity, Colonel Hamilton returned to Mrs. Hamlyn and the family, from whom he was careful to conceal the name of the visitor to whom he had been called away ; and after entering

kindly into the dismay produced by Harry's non-appearance, and the lamentations of the poor mother that the dreadful news must now reach him abruptly, wherever he might happen to be, the dispirited old man persuaded her to adjourn to her chamber, watched over by Ellen, and insisted that her daughters should retire to bed. As a pretext for driving them to repose, he stated his desire to take a few hours' rest on the drawing-room sofa; Walter Hamlyn having resolutely declined his offer of sharing his vigils beside the wounded man, who was passing a far better night than had been hoped or predicted.

By these arrangements, Colonel Hamilton was soon left alone in that self-same gorgeous apartment, of which Hamlyn himself had been the sole occupant at that hour the preceding night. But in how different a frame of mind, and with what opposite intentions! The banker had been steeling his mind for a barbarous purpose and unchristian encounter, —the old man was devising projects of mercy and peace! The banker had recoiled with

horror from reminiscences of a life of impenitence and hardness of heart ; the old man attempted to compose *his* fluttered spirits by reflections full of tenderness and love ! The banker had attempted to nerve his courage for impending dangers by reliance on his usual good luck, and the false energy produced by that systematic deference to the opinion of the world which had often enabled him to work miracles for the redemption of his character ;—the old man reclined *his* head humbly on his bosom, and recommended himself and those who were dear to him to the mercy and providence of God !—

“ In this very room,” was the last reflection that soothed his aching heart, and smoothed his troubled eyelids to rest,—“ did my poor boys often spend a cheerful holiday ! Here they used to think of their poor old father, and the home they were never to see again. And with the aid of the Almighty, I will do a father’s part by the children of the unfortunate man who is groaning in his bed yonder, on whom the LORD have pity !”

He slept!—a sleep how different from that of the feverish sufferer above! But he had not been more than three hours lost in slumber, when he was startled by a cold hand placed upon his own.

“What the deuce! have I overslept myself?”—cried he, starting from the sofa, in the belief that Johnston, whom he had forewarned for the purpose, was come to call him. But though all was dark in the room, save where the cold dim light of a spring twilight struggled through the chinks of the window-shutters and muslin curtains, (the draperies having been left undrawn in the confusion of the night before,) he speedily saw that the person by whom his hand was so eagerly grasped was no servant; and a few wild words of explanation soon apprized him that the fatal papers having reached Cambridge at night with the rumour of his father’s death, Harry Hamlyn, who had only reinstated himself at Trinity a few hours before, had instantly got into a post-chaise and hurried to town.

“I was afraid I should be too late—oh,

how afraid I should be too late !”—faltered he, opening his whole heart to the man with whom he had not yet exchanged fifty words, but whom he interpreted by his acts into every thing that was just, generous, and humane. “ And what would have become of me, had I not arrived in time ? It was more essential for *me* than for the rest to receive his last blessing,—for I am the only one of his children who ever crossed him !—Are you aware that he once cursed me ? He, my poor father !—And to think that he might have died without a word of forgiveness !”—

Tears burst from the eyes of the distracted young man, as, with clasped hands and heaving bosom, he uttered those incoherent words—“ But he is better !”—continued he, struggling to recover himself. “ He has passed a good night. He has enjoyed some hours sleep. I have just left Walter. I have even knelt, unseen by the bed-side of my father, who must not be disturbed. But, before relieving my brother from his watch, that he also may take some rest, I could not help coming to

thank you, sir, for being here,—you and *her* ! It is so like you both !—God bless you, God bless you !”—

All this time, Colonel Hamilton was striving to compose his thoughts, and resume the chain of his over-night considerations. It seemed grievous to molest the harassed and delicate young man before him, weary with a night's travelling as well as distracted by a night's anguish, with mere words of business;—to arrest the warm current of his filial feelings by dry obstacles of worldly solicitude. But it was indispensable. The interests of too many human beings were dependent on the event. In as few words, therefore, as possible, Colonel Hamilton explained to Henry the critical position of his father's affairs; and the vital necessity that palliative measures should be adopted without delay.

To his great surprise, very little emotion was produced by the terrible announcement. Either Harry was strangely ignorant of the magnitude of the transactions in which his father's house was engaged; or the blow by

which he had been previously smitten had actually stunned him. *So* completely, indeed, did he appear bewildered, and so thoroughly absorbed by the idea of his father's danger, that Colonel Hamilton judged it his duty to touch upon two strings, which, in the first instance, he had with scrupulous delicacy avoided. He spoke of the future welfare of his mother and sisters as at stake,—he spoke of the dishonour likely to fall upon the name of his father!—

“ Let us go, then ! ”—exclaimed Harry. “ There is not a moment to be lost ! Let us hasten into the city.” And after attempting in vain to reduce his disordered dress and haggard looks to an air of propriety, he kept hurrying Colonel Hamilton to his father's dressing-room, adjoining the study below, where breakfast was set out ; and each drank a cup of tea standing, ere they proceeded into the city in a hackney-coach.

The streets were nearly empty. The shops, slowly unclosing their windows as they approached the more commercial quarter of the

town, began to restore an air of life and decency to the streets, paraded an hour before only by the outcasts of the metropolis, and the police stationed there for their coercion; and by the time they reached Lombard Street, though the clock of St. Sepulchre's had not yet struck seven, the shop-boys of the city were busily engaged in making the pavement impassable with their irrigations.

On the hackney-coach drawing up, the door was partly unclosed to admit them by the old porter of the compting-house, who appeared to have been posted there in expectation; and as they passed onwards into the private room where Spilsby now reigned supreme, the old man plucked young Hamlyn by the sleeve to inquire after his poor master. It would have been a comfort to Harry, had his own heart been less full, to perceive that this venerable servitor had tears in his eyes.

Though they were before their time, with the punctuality so highly lauded by the old soldier, the clerks, the Harringtons, the soli-

citors, and two strangers, (one of whom was introduced to Colonel Hamilton as the stock-broker charged with the business of the house,) were already assembled; with the books open on the table before them, and their lengthened countenances bearing ominous testimony to the unsatisfactory nature of the examination. Even the intelligence brought by the new comers that Mr. Hamlyn had passed a good night, and was going on as well as possible, did little towards unbending the brows of the gloomy synod.

No one seemed anxious to be the first to speak, seeing that every word uttered must be an accusation against the acting partner of the house, in his own absence, and the presence of his son. But, had any spectator, personally uninterested in the scene, been present, he could scarcely have failed to observe, that the deference habitually testified towards Hamlyn and Co. by Wigwell and Slack was already transferred to Colonel Hamilton, the Dives of the party.

“ I am extremely sorry to say, sir,” ob-

served Spilsby, after due salutation to Henry Hamlyn and his venerable companion, “ that matters here wear a still more unpromising aspect than I represented to you last night. Various securities on which I had counted as of an available nature are unaccountably missing; and, though I have no doubt that Mr. Hamlyn, on his restoration to health, will be able to enlighten us as to his manner of disposing of them, at present we are wholly in the dark. From indications afforded me by Mr. Andrew Harrington and his brother, I have reason to fear that the run upon the house will continue unabated; and that the cruel report of Mr. Hamlyn’s death by his own hand, having reached our country correspondents last night, the post will bring in heavy demands. Mr. Bernard Hamlyn has not yet arrived in town, and I have only twenty thousand pounds and a fraction to open with this morning.”

At this announcement, the two solicitors looked at each other with an air of blank amaze-

ment ; the two uncles upon Henry, with a gaze of mournful compassion ; while the stockbroker and his companion elevated their eyebrows, and muttered something unintelligible to the heads of their canes.

“ In which case, to open at all were an act of insanity ! ” —observed Andrew Harrington, in a decided tone. “ But it is impossible that such a business as this should be so utterly unprovided with resources ! ”

“ Mr. Hamlyn managed the concern in his own way, sir, admitting no person wholly into his confidence,” replied Spilsby. “ ’Till Mr. Bernard Hamlyn shall arrive, I am prepared to say nothing.”

“ And if he don’t arrive, then the house must stop payment ? ” demanded Colonel Hamilton, coming abruptly to the point.

A distressing silence afforded the only reply to this direct apostrophe.

“ God bless my soul ! Can *nothing* be done ? ” cried the Colonel. “ Surely poor Hamlyn, who has so many friends, and acted so liberally to all the world, is not to be mo-

lest and disgraced on his deathbed, for want of a moneyed man or two willing to come forward in his behalf? *You, sir!*" continued he, turning towards Andrew Harrington—"you, sir, who are so near a connection of the family, surely you will do the part of a kinsman by this unfortunate man?"

"I will do the part of a brother by his unfortunate wife, and her children shall be to me as my own," was the stern reply of the uncompromising London merchant. "But if the risk of half-a-crown of mine would keep Richard Hamlyn out of the Gazette, I do not scruple to say that I would not put it down. I speak for brother and self. We are here as trustees for the wife and children. Excuse me, Harry! You are not in a state to judge of my motives. But that I respect your filial feelings, my dear nephew, I would say more."

Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, perceiving by the countenance of Colonel Hamilton that he was disposed to resent this churlishness on the part of Mrs. Hamlyn's wealthy brothers, fan-

cied they were serving their own cause, if not their client's, in endeavouring to shake the resolution of Harrington Brothers, by representing the pressure on Hamlyn's house to be temporary and accidental; and that, with a little assistance from without, the firm would be able not only to weather the storm, but take its stand with additional credit from this demonstration of strength in the moneyed world. But, even after this appeal, the brothers-in-law and stockbroker remained mute as fishes. It was clear that they, at least, thought otherwise.

“ Meanwhile,” cried Henry Hamlyn, suddenly withdrawing the clasped hands with which he had concealed his face,—“ nothing is done,—and my father's credit is at stake,—the fruit of twenty years' undeviating integrity and unwearied labour!—He must not only die in the prime of life, but die humiliated and disgraced !”

Andrew Harrington uttered not a syllable ; but his brother Thomas was troubled with a short dry cough, which appeared of evil omen

to the anxious Spilsby, whose hope of assistance from what were called the friends of the house was becoming gradually extinguished.

“Were there time to call around us my father’s friends and colleagues,” persisted Harry,—“or had I only a dozen hours before me, I should feel safe. But if those on whom we have the claims of blood—”

“I tell ye what!—” interrupted Colonel Hamilton, laying his hand graspingly on Harry’s arm to forestall words of fruitless exacerbation,—but himself addressing the party assembled round the table,—“I am myself nowise akin to Richard Hamlyn,—and no otherwise interested in his welfare than as from friend to friend. But in *my* view, that’s a holier bond than many folks are disposed to admit; and so, I’m willing to stand the gist of what others are startled at. I’ve a matter of about two hundred thousand pounds, say two hundred thousand, in various securities lodged with the house, most of them tangible; and all I can say is that the firm is

perfectly at liberty to convert as much of them into money for its own purposes, as will carry it safely through the storm."

A murmur of gratitude and admiration burst from the solicitors, stockbrokers, and clerk, wholly indifferent to Colonel Hamilton; who had his ample reward in the silent pressure of the hand bestowed upon him by his own and Ellen's young friend, Harry.—But he could not but notice at the same time, that Andrew Harrington and his brother regarded him with a look of the same contemptuous pity they would have bestowed upon a patient escaped from a lunatic asylum.

"We must lose no time," said the stockbroker, looking at his watch,—“we have brought it to half-past seven! I shall be extremely happy to accommodate the firm with twenty thousand, on the responsibility and receipt of Colonel Hamilton,—as I fear there would be no time for the realization of the securities to which he alludes—”

“Or if deposited with me,” said the other friend of the house, who proved to be an ex-

tensive Russia merchant, under considerable obligations to the house of Hamlyn and Co., —“ I shall be happy to advance their full amount.”—

“ You allude, I conclude, sir,” said Spilsby, whose countenance ever since the hostile declarations of the two Harringtons had been subsiding from pale to paler, —“ to the sum of £84,742 and a fraction, standing in the 3 per cent. consols, in the joint names of yourself and Mr. Hamlyn ?”—

“ To that,—to my Long Annuities,—India Bonds,—and other matters. But I suppose the money in the funds is most come-at-able!”—said the Colonel. “ This gentleman I understand to be the broker of the firm? Let him conclude the sale,—bring me the necessary papers, and I will sign them before I leave the house.”

And while Wigwell and Slack proceeded to murmur all the best sounding nouns in their vocabulary nearest related to the cardinal virtues,—such as—“ liberality,—generosity,—disinterestedness,—nobleness,—magnanimity,

friendship, — worth,” — Spilsby busied himself, or affected to busy himself, with careful examination of a folio marked in white on a red ground with a stupendous H—; and a variety of day-books, stock-receipts, and miscellaneous papers, that seemed to bear reference to Colonel Hamilton’s account with the house. At length, after prodigious rustlings and shufflings, and opening and shutting of tin boxes, the bald-headed clerk summoned the stockbroker into a corner, and commenced a whispered dialogue, which one or two of those present seemed inclined to resent as a lapse of confidence. It did not, however, last long. With a face of ashy paleness and quivering lips, Spilsby returned to the table which the others had not quitted ; and, after muttering an unintelligible preamble concerning his own regrets and horror on the occasion, stated that he had reason to believe the stock in question was not forthcoming ; that his friend Mr. Slicem, to whom he had just referred, perfectly well remembered having at divers times disposed for Mr. Hamlyn of

large portions of the stock in question, which, at the last sale, had dwindled to a few thousands.

“ And yet, strange and melancholy to say,” pursued the clerk, “ no entry of these sales appears to have been carried to Colonel Hamilton’s account !” —

“ I feared as much !” — was the whispered ejaculation of Andrew Harrington to his brother.

“ I had, perhaps, better take this opportunity of stating,” resumed Spilsby with blanched lips, — “ that the course of examination into the private accounts of the firm in which I have passed the night gives me reason to fear that other securities of a similar nature will prove deficient.”

“ Sell my stock ? — dispose of my property ?” murmured Colonel Hamilton. “ Well, ’tis my own fault ! — I gave him free leave.”

“ The sooner this question is cleared up, the better !” — cried Andrew Harrington. “ In half an hour, either this house must open, or suspend its payments. The point

of embezzlement or non-embezzlement had best be premonitorily cleared up. Mr. Spilsby can ascertain from Colonel Hamilton's account the nature of the securities which ought, in *his* instance, to be in deposit. If missing—”

The bald-headed clerk interrupted the somewhat severe schooling of Mr. Harrington, by addressing in a low voice to Colonel Hamilton a succession of inquiries, to which answers were returned aloud by the veteran, with irrepressible exclamations of surprise.

“Gone?”—cried he. “The India Bonds sold?—The Spanish too?—In short, I am to look on myself as a ruined man!”—

Spilsby had not courage to meet the eyes of the old soldier; still less, to utter a syllable in reply.

“Well, well!”—cried he. “At all events, Moonjee's remittances are at present on the high seas. Thanks be to Providence, I may still find butter to my bread! And to think that the friend in whom I confided as in my Maker should have done this!—The Lord for-

give him !—But the unfortunate fellow is at least making heavy atonement !”

The stockbroker, who, at Spilsby's suggestion, had hurried home to his office in Birchin Lane to consult his books respecting the transactions in question, now reappeared, breathless and agitated, with confirmation of their worst suspicions, as well as of others privately communicated to him by Spilsby.

“There's a terrible press without, awaiting the opening of the doors,” said he. “I had nearly my coat torn off by people applying to me for information, as to one connected with the business of the house. All I could say at all satisfactory was that there appeared every probability of Hamlyn's recovery. But it was not *that* they cared for !”—

“I see no use in attempting to keep up the farce !” said Andrew Harrington, in a determined voice. “My nephew having left the room, poor fellow, I state at once my opinion, that to open the house for the despatch of business is wholly out of the question. It is impossible to surmise to what amount the

credit of Hamlyn may be compromised. The fact is, that the firm was involved at the old man's death. Ever since, instead of retrieving himself by self-denial and economy, Richard Hamlyn has been plunging deeper and deeper into the mire, and attempting to cut through the knot of his difficulties by mad and unjustifiable speculations. *My* remonstrances on the subject produced enmity between us;—and Heaven knows it is no satisfaction to *me* that all my predictions concerning my unfortunate sister's family have so speedily come to pass!"

No one interrupted him. Colonel Hamilton was gone in search of Harry, whom he found exhausted by anguish of mind ensuing on want of rest and nourishment, half fainting on one of the chests in the compting-house. The solicitors were consulting together in what shape to insure priority of payment to their claims upon the firm; and it was only the stockbroker and Russia merchant who remained with Spilsby to coincide in the decision of the Harringtons, that circulars

should be instantly printed, announcing the temporary closing of the house of Hamlyn and Co., on account of the precarious condition of the acting partner and the absence of the junior!

Mr. Slicem undertook to have this form, which was hastily drawn up by Spilsby under Andrew Harrington's directions, conveyed to the parties who undertake the printing and dissemination of such documents. But, as he quitted the house, and attempted to make his way down the door-steps, which were as densely crowded as the entrance to a theatre previous to opening the doors, a carriage and four dashed along the street, and drew up as near the door as the gathering of the mob would allow.

The crest upon the travelling carriage was noticed. In a moment, it was whispered, and in the next, positively known, that the hasty traveller was no other than the junior partner of Hamlyn's firm; and, as it opportunely occurred to the stockbroker that his arrival might produce some modification in the paper

he carried in his pocket, he applied to the policemen previously keeping order in that tumultuous assemblage, to facilitate his passage through the crowd.

When, therefore, Bernard Hamlyn, an enfeebled, fractious invalid, was assisted out of his carriage by a stout, burly individual, whom some concluded to be his valet de chambre, and some, with more truth, his country attorney (but who at present looked exceedingly like his keeper), he was conveyed into the banking-house between two policemen, giving him very much the air of a delinquent in custody, greatly to the increase of his natural nervousness and incompetency.

Bernard Hamlyn was a meagre, feeble, under-sized man, having hair and eyelashes the colour and texture of silk, and a voice like a broken pan-pipe.

“I received your letter by express late last night, gentlemen,” said he, fretfully addressing the persons he found assembled in the private room ; “*why* you have summoned me here I cannot guess. I am very unequal to

the execution of such a journey,—*very* unequal, indeed.—It is well known that I have never interfered in the concerns of this house,—that I am very unequal to business,—*very* unequal indeed ! All I have to ask, therefore, is that you will communicate your wishes as speedily as possible to this gentleman, my legal adviser, who will act in concert with you,—to which effort I am very unequal,—*very* unequal indeed !”

From this preamble, it was pretty clear that the junior partner brought no accession of counsel to the consultation ; and it was soon equally apparent that the means of the selfish hypochondriac were as shallow as his wit. His whole fortune was embarked in the firm ; and the country attorney, his esquire of the body (if he possessed a body), who evidently came prepared to bluster and protect the egotism of his employer from molestation and his fortune from risk, was soon compelled to knock under, and announce to Bernard Hamlyn, on the showing of his shrewder brother lawyers, Wigwell and Slack, that he was

nearer a fiat of bankruptcy in reality than he fancied himself to be to his grave.

“It is very hard that I should be routed out of my quiet country retirement to listen to such harassing details as these!” faltered the man, who had hitherto conceived the business of a banker to consist in receiving quarterly an income of six thousand a-year. “I am very unequal to such a shock,—*very* unequal indeed. I am a sad invalid,—a very sad invalid. My medical attendant assured me that this hurried journey might have a most serious effect upon a man in my state of health.”

But no one gave ear to his peevish grumblings; not even the burly attorney. Each man present was intent upon his own grievous share in the calamity, against which there was no further hope of succour. Each was calculating the amount of his impending losses; with the exception of Colonel Hamilton, who exerted himself to remove the still half insensible Henry from the spot, ere the posting of the placard should announce the closing of the house.

The poor old porter was sobbing helpless behind the door as they passed. The aspect of the despairing countenances and ferocious eyes that met Colonel Hamilton's view in the throng without, as the policeman assisted them into their hackney-coach, had not faded from his recollection, even when, after a slow return towards the West End, they reached the inauspicious purlieus of Cavendish Square.

On entering the coach, the old man had taken the arm of the unresisting Henry under his, and kept his hand fondly clasped within his own, till they approached together the "house no more his home." Not a token of consciousness or recognition escaped the heart-broken young man! — Colonel Hamilton was forced to assist him from the coach, as he would have assisted the helplessness of a child.

So thoroughly absorbed was he, indeed, by the alarming state of exhaustion of his young friend, and so bewildered by the exciting

scenes which had been passing before his eyes, that he took no note of the aspect of the servants who met him on the door-steps. Even when Johnston addressed him in the hall, the deplorable condition of the fine young fellow leaning upon his arm was more to the Colonel than any tidings he could have to learn of improvement in the wounded man.

He led him into the study, as though the house were his own and poor Harry a visitor, and placed him silently on the sofa. At that moment, Mrs. Hamilton, who had been watching anxiously for their arrival, in the earnestness of her desire to see them ere they went up stairs, hurried into the room.

On perceiving Colonel Hamilton leaning over the half fainting Henry, she beckoned him towards her, and would fain have spoken. But the kind old soul, whose eyes were obscured by gathering tears, forestalled the question he fancied her about to ask.

“ Yes ! all is over, Nelly ! ”—said he. “ The house has stopped payment. Go to him ! ”

Say a kind word to him. The poor fellow has no longer a guinea in the world—”

Ere he could add another syllable, Ellen was beside the scarcely conscious young man—taking his hands into hers, pressing them to her lips, her eyes, rather with the wild tenderness of a mother who finds a lost child restored to her, than the shamefacedness of a mistress or sober affection of a wife.

“ Mine for ever ! ” —whispered she, with streaming eyes, as she pressed him to her heart. “ *Ours* for ever ! ” she repeated, turning towards Colonel Hamilton, who had advanced towards them, and was contemplating with deep feeling the fervent nature betrayed at such a moment by the woman he had always seen so cold, so haughty, so reserved.

Taking their united hands in his, the old man murmured a fervent blessing on their heads. And then, for the first time since he became aware of the family dishonour, the tears of Henry Hamlyn burst forth.

Alas ! he knew not yet one half his cause for sorrow ! —The motive of Ellen’s im-

patience to meet them by the way was only to soften by due preparation the announcement of a new calamity.

During their absence in the city, Mr. Hamlyn had breathed his last !—

CHAPTER VIII.

My youth hath acted
Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length
By varied pleasures,—sweetened in the mixture,
But tragical in the issue. Beauty, pomp,
With every sensuality our giddiness
Doth frame an idol, are inconstant friends
When any troubled passion makes us halt
On the unguarded castle of the mind.

FORD.

As the unnatural composure produced by the administration of strong opiates subsided, the wounded man had exhibited symptoms of restlessness and irritability which produced considerable alarm in the mind of his attendant. Within half an hour of Colonel Hamilton's departure for the

city, he had judged it necessary to send for the eminent surgeons to whose higher judgment his patient had been entrusted.

Scarcely was this precautionary measure taken, when Hamlyn himself seemed conscious of a change.—His eyes kept wandering round, as if in search of some unseen object ; and when told, on inquiring for Walter, that his son was dozing on the sofa, at the foot of his bed, he suddenly asked for Henry.—With the sort of clairvoyance that appears to invest somnambulists and dying persons, he seemed to have become inexplicably aware of Harry's arrival in town during the night.

The reply of Ramsay, though expressly intended to restore his master to composure, was unluckily calculated only to stimulate the fever of his frame.

“ Mr. Henry and Colonel Hamilton are gone to Lombard Street, sir !” said the butler, in his usual deferential tone.

“ The head-clerk was here late last night ; and the Colonel desired he might be called at

seven, to be at the banking-house before opening time."

A sudden shivering fit seemed to pervade the frame of his unfortunate master, at this intelligence.

"They are *gone*?—You are quite sure that they are gone, at the summons of Spilsby?"—said he, in an unnaturally hoarse voice.

"Quite sure, sir! Mr. Henry spent half an hour by your bed-side in the night; and very much afflicted and broken he looked, when he stepped into the coach with Colonel Hamilton."

A moan escaped the lips of the banker, as his head sunk back upon the pillow on hearing these words; and when Ramsay bent over him to hold the usual restoratives to his nostrils, he saw that a cold dew was rising on the livid face.

"Call Walter!"—said his master, faintly.

"Captain Hamlyn is still asleep,"—replied Ramsay, remembering his master's former anxious injunction that his son should on no account be disturbed.

“ Call him,—or it will be too late !” — persisted Mr. Hamlyn ; and in another moment, poor Walter, roused from one of those dreams of love and peace with which some evil influence seems to delight in mocking the anguish of the unhappy,—the condemned felon in his cell, — the exile in his banishment, — was standing beside the bed of death.

“ Nearer !” — said Mr. Hamlyn, as the young man, still imperfectly awakened, stood bewildered at his side.

“ Stoop down to me, Walter ! Listen to me, my son ! — I am going where there must be an end to human love !” — faltered the dying man, contemplating with fixed and glazing eyes the fine face now bending over him in unspeakable anguish. “ Walter ! do not curse me when I am gone ! — I have loved you very dearly ! — Do not think too hardly of your poor father !” —

“ My dearest, dearest father, — let me call for help !” — exclaimed his son, perceiving that his end was indeed drawing near. “ Surely you will see my mother — my sisters ? — There

is yet time, if you desire spiritual consolation—”

“ I desire only *you* !”—replied the dying man. “ It is too late for repentance, Walter;—too late even for explanation. But the grave covers all! My life has been a mistake,—beginning in error, ending in crime! My father was a spendthrift.—He left me only a ruined business,—an embarrassed estate! I loved him living,—I loved his memory,—I tried to preserve it from shame, even at the expense of——Walter!—when you hear me condemned,—think leniently of one who adored *you* even as he had adored his father! Think leniently of me. Protect your mother—the best, the most exemplary of women. Do your utmost to conceal from the world the disordered state of the banking-house. But above—above all—think—think leniently—of —” His utterance became more and more impeded. Yet by a sudden effort, as if roused by the tears that fell profusely from the eyes of Captain Hamlyn, he put forth his hand already cold with the approach of death,

and, drawing down the face of his son towards him, imprinted a fervent kiss,—the first since childhood—upon his lips !

As he relinquished his hold, his head fell back heavily on the pillow.—His eyes fixed eagerly and searchingly upon those of Captain Hamlyn, and were never afterwards withdrawn. In a moment, a strange gurgling sound was audible in his throat. Blood, mingled with foam, burst from his lips ;—and though his eyes still remained riveted on those of his son, there was no longer meaning in their glassy gaze.—Already, they were fixed in death !—

Before the arrival of the surgeons who had been sent for, all was over ; and their countenances in quitting the house forestalled all necessity for announcement to those without of the fatal event. The afflicting news had been cautiously revealed to Mrs. Hamlyn and her daughters by Mrs. Hamilton, previous to the Colonel's arrival ; and while Ellen was lavishing her gentle words and endearments upon Henry, Walter was striving to support

the courage of his mother sufficiently to enable her to enter the chamber of death, to which she proposed to accompany the poor girls who yearned to look for the last time upon their father's face.

A similar feeling soon suggested itself to poor Harry, even amid the consolations so precious to his heart; and Colonel Hamilton lent him his arm to the door of the room, but forbore to enter;—feeling that, at so sacred a moment, the kindred of the dead ought to be alone with their dead.

When Henry entered, the three broken-hearted women were on their knees in prayer around the bed. Walter was standing beside his mother, with his tearful eyes fixed like hers upon the now powerless form and passionless face, instinct but a few hours before with vigour, intellect, command;—and the moment the door opened, the two brothers, thus meeting for the first time since their calamity, rushed instinctively into each other's arms, and clung to each other weeping,—as if tacitly expressing a pledge and

promise of strengthened fraternal love. Neither of them had, at that moment, a thought or care that was not comprised in the senseless form before them, and the sorrowing women at their feet. Worldly poverty and worldly shame were mere words to their ear, in presence of their dead father; and while all London was ringing with the ruin and wretchedness of the Hamlyns, they were united in that little chamber, taking no thought of silver or gold; and willing to squander the wealth of the world, had it been placed at their disposal, to restore animation to him who lay extended on that blood-stained bed,—the victim of one of those privileged assassinations authorized by the customs of the civilized world.

Nevertheless it was the sight of those helpless sisters and mother that served to restore to poor Henry a sense of their terrible situation. It was necessary his mother should be warned,—it was indispensable his brother should be apprised that they were penniless and disgraced, as well as bereft of husband

and father. To himself, at present, the worst part of the evil was fortunately unknown. He still believed the firm to have sunk under the pressure of sudden and undeserved difficulties; and in communicating the fatal tidings to Walter, repeated again and again,—“Thank Heaven, *he* was spared the knowledge of what has happened! A man of *his* strict integrity and nice sense of honour would have died in agony indeed, if aware of the discredit about to attach itself to his name!”—

The two young men were fortunately relieved from the painful duty of informing their beloved mother of the unsuspected aggravation of her misfortunes. The instant her brothers became aware of the event which had taken place in Cavendish Square, both hastened to her side, with entreaties that she would quit the house with her family, and accept a home with either. But of this removal she would not hear. So long as the breathless form of their father remained there, she felt it to be the abiding-place of her children; and on her expressing this feel-

ing firmly and strongly, Mr. Harrington, with as much delicacy as was consistent with his straightforward habits of life, apprized her of the doubly melancholy position in which they were placed.

That instant, she desired to be left alone with her brothers. She did not choose that her innocent girls, still less that her noble-minded sons, should hear the terrible question she was about to ask, and to ask with fear and trembling, under the roof still sheltering the worthless clay of him who was gone to his dread account. The house had stopped payment ; it was a misfortune,—but she and hers could work,—she and hers could want.—All she desired to know was whether that misfortune were connected with a crime ! Hamlyn and Co. were insolvents, bankrupts, ruined, lost ; but—She had not courage in the end to pronounce the fatal question !—

But her compassionate brother understood her ; and attempted, as best he might, to soften the blow he was compelled to deal in narrating the startling discoveries which had

taken place. As if such griefs *were* to be palliated! Say what he might, the fact was before her in all its damning atrocity. *She* knew all that the honest man before her must be feeling; or rather she knew it *not*, for the moment she fully understood that knavery of the blackest kind was attributed to the father of her children, she sank into utter insensibility, securing her from further anguish.

In this state, she was resigned by her sympathizing brother to the care of Mrs. Hamilton, who was taking on herself towards them the care and responsibility becoming an adopted daughter of the house; and while Ellen, Lydia, and Miss Creswell placed her in bed, and tendered all the aid available to one whose soul is crushed to the dust by accumulated misfortune, the Harringtons and Colonel Hamilton entered into deliberate discussion of the further steps necessary to be taken for the family. An inquest must of course be held on the body of Mr. Hamlyn; and Andrew Harrington insisted upon placing in the hands of Walter a considerable sum

for the immediate needs of the establishment.

Little accustomed to receive pecuniary favours, and still less disposed to receive them from his well-thinking but harshly-spoken uncle, Captain Hamlyn was about to reject the offer, when Andrew Harrington interrupted him.

“ You have no right to trifle with the destinies of your mother, my dear nephew !”—said he. “ Henceforward, the responsibilities of a family man are on your shoulders; and the sooner you accustom yourself to the idea that nothing now belongs to you in this house, the better. These are afflicting words, Walter; but you will expose yourself to bitterer mortifications than any you are likely to meet at the hands of a kinsman who loves you, unless you make up your mind at once to the just decree which apportions all you have been accustomed to consider your own, to the creditors of your father's estate. It is on this account I would fain have my poor Sophia and her girls safely and respectably lodged under my roof.”

Satisfied that reflection would convey a better lesson to the bewildered young man than all his exhortations, the sturdy but good-hearted merchant now left him to himself; but scarcely had he quitted the house, when Walter was exposed to new and equally kind solicitations from another quarter.

“I have insisted upon the privilege of family connection to intrude upon you, my dear Captain Hamlyn,” said Lady Rotherwood, who chose to accompany her nephew on his next return to the house. “I am come in the name of my sister, who cannot altogether entrust her message to Dartford; and poor Geraldine is so ill, so nervous, so overwhelmed by the misfortune that has befallen her poor child, as to be incapable of leaving the house. She has begged me, therefore, to express a hope that your mother and the girls will take shelter in her quiet house from the distressing scenes that await them here. To dear Lydia she feels almost intitled. But she has a heart and home for them all, if you will prevail on Mrs. Hamlyn

to regard her and the rest of us in the affectionate light in which we wish to be considered."

Lord Dartford now broke in with entreaties to his friend to comply with the wishes of the Marchioness; and Walter, who saw they were fully aware of the ruin of his unfortunate family, felt deeply impressed by their prompt and generous renewal of attentions towards the *widow of the bankrupt!* Very little, however, did he suspect the full amount of their generosity. Very little did he conjecture that flying rumours had already reached even the Marchioness of Dartford, (with the hundreds of Flimflams vibrating about in London clubs and London society,—the flash notes in general circulation,—where and how speedily will not rumours extend?) that Hamlyn the banker had escaped by his untimely end not only the shame of bankruptcy, but the rigour of the law. Already the words fraud and embezzlement connected themselves with his dishonoured name!—

"It is quite impossible for Mrs. Hamlyn

and her daughters to remain here, my dear Walter !” exclaimed Lord Dartford, “ still less would it be advisable for them to remove to Dean Park. If they will not give my mother the happiness of receiving them in town, at least prevail on them to consider Dartford Hall their own. *There* they would be quite alone, quite unmolested, quite independent. *There* the indulgence of their grief would be undisturbed. I scarcely know how to say it, but it is necessary for me to add that a thousand pounds have been paid by our banker, in Mrs. Hamlyn’s name, to a credit at Drummond’s.”

These generous offers were received by Walter with due acknowledgment ; but an entreaty that the sun might go down on their grief, ere any future measures were determined. For the whole family, rest was indispensable. Early on the morrow, the inquest was to be held, which was to decide whether propitiatory victims were to be offered up to the memory on which, at that moment, execrations were being heaped from every quar-

ter; and Captain Hamlyn was convinced that, till the remains of his father were consigned to the grave, the widow would remain faithful to her post of duty.

While the affliction of the family was thus surrounded with deferential regard, the outcries against the baseness and hypocrisy of the fraudulent bankrupt, became not only deep but loud. He had deceived every body, —he had abused the confidence of every body; —and friend and foe were alike invoked in his ruin. The blow of the failure of Hamlyn and Co. had a stirring effect in the city.—If *they* were insecure, who was solid? If the pains-taking, virtuous, exemplary Hamlyn was a knave, whose honesty was to be trusted?—More than one banking-house of the highest reputation had cause to rue the discoveries of that day!—

But amid the disregarded clamours and lamentations of the injured cliency of the house, those more immediately connected with it were among its bitterest, because most capable, assailants. The first document

secured by Spilsby, in his search during the night preceding Richard Hamlyn's decease, was the fatal paper whose signature was so compromising to himself; and this once committed to the flames, he felt re-established in the security of innocence, and privileged to purchase his own indemnity by zeal in detecting the delinquencies of his late employer, and fervour in pointing them out. From the peculiarities of the case, it was decided that the bankruptcy of the firm could not be too speedily legalized; and before the grave had closed over Richard Hamlyn, the Gazette completed the publicity which the details of the inquest had imparted to his ruin and disgrace.

The columns of the daily papers now teemed with anecdotes of his crimes and misdemeanours. It was the interest of the Vernon family, and the friends of the still more deeply implicated offender by whose hand he had fallen, to clothe his name and cause with all the infamy of which both were only too susceptible; and already the memory of the

man who for so many years had been esteemed without spot or blemish, was loaded with all the disgrace of a commercial swindler and political adventurer, whose disastrous end was, in fact, mere matter of retribution.

There was something almost fiendish, meanwhile, in the malignant care with which Spilsby, and his advisers Messrs. Wigwell and Slack, contrived to place the frauds and embezzlements of Hamlyn in the clearest light. Though, till the first meeting of creditors, there was no need to publish the particulars of the funds abstracted and securities misapplied, the newspapers were soon in possession of circumstances that could only have emanated from authority ; and not a private paper, not a secret memorandum, of the man so cautious in his frauds that his very shadow was scarcely admitted to participation in the mystery, but was now a matter for advertisement on all the walls and palings of the metropolis, to augment the sale of the Sunday papers !—

Such is the shortsighted cunning of the

crafty ;—such the hollowness of dishonest ostentation !—The errors committed by Richard Hamlyn, the crimes perpetrated by the banker, had originated solely in a desire to create in the eyes of the world a false seeming of opulence and dignity. And now, not a huckster within twenty miles of Dean Park,—not an apprentice in the City of London,—but was aware to a fraction of the amount to which old Walter Hamlyn had been involved at his death, and of the annual thousands abstracted by him from the property of his constituents, to enable him to give costly dinner-parties,—figure at royal entertainments,—and maintain in the history of the shire of Warwick the factitious consequence of “ Hamlyn of Dean Park.”

The man of iron will was already mocked and derided in his shroud by the puppets he had despised ;—the man of immaculate virtue recognized as a knave ;—the man of exquisite dissembling unmasked, that all might point the finger at his detection !—The very beggar at the crossing in Lombard Street who had

been wont to profit by his pharisaical almsgiving, would not for worlds have exchanged the memory of *his* life of mud and rags, hunger and cold, for that of the man of purple and fine linen, who had dipped in the dish with princes of the blood,—fattened on the good things of this world,—commanded the cheers of parliament,—the esteem of his fellow-citizens,—and the confidence of dupes to the amount of hundreds of thousands !—

The person who had most to suffer from the weight of obloquy heaped on the memory of Hamlyn, during the first few days succeeding his decease, was Lord Dartford. Walter and Henry were confined to the house, almost to their bed ; and care was taken by the servants that no newspapers reached the hands of either. But the Marquis, though the greater portion of his time was spent in Cavendish Square, could neither turn a disregardful eye to the statements that met him at every corner, nor a deaf ear to the entreaties of his uncle Lord Crawley, that he would seriously consider to what extent his honour

was pledged, ere he degraded the unblemished name of his family by connection with that of one of the most consummate villains of modern times.

“I should be a still greater villain myself, if, for a moment, I confounded my affianced wife or my future brothers-in-law with one who is a disgrace to the country!” replied the Marquis, with indignation. “On the contrary, I am only in hopes my mother will accelerate the period fixed by herself for my marriage, in order to redeem my dearest Lydia the sooner, from a name that so ill becomes her. The first thing she did on hearing her father’s insolvency, was to release me from my engagement. Were she aware of the odious circumstances connected with it, I verily believe that excess of delicacy would inspire her with the determination never to become my wife. — Be assured, therefore, my dear uncle, that, with all due deference to your authority, nothing will be left undone on my part to hasten the solemnization of our marriage.”

This generous resolution did not, however, prevent him from being hourly molested by some new proof of Hamlyn's cold-blooded hypocrisy, or some fresh instance of the distress occasioned in private life by his fraudulent transactions. Lord Dartford literally trembled at the idea of what his friend Walter might have to undergo when he emerged from his present retirement. Already he had announced his intention of leaving his regiment ; the six thousand pounds he would receive for his troop constituting, for the future, his sole provision in life.

At present, however, the whole attention of the young man was absorbed by the instructions of the two Harringtons concerning the administration of the bankrupt's estate, and their painful duty towards those denounced by the finding of the Inquest, as the **WILFUL MURDERERS** of their father !

The first bitter lesson imparted to the two young men concerning the dishonour which had befallen them in the person of the deceased, regarded the interment of his remains.

To the widow had been referred the question concerning the spot, selected in his life-time by Mr. Hamlyn, for his last resting-place; when both Walter and Henry eagerly forestalled her answer by naming the family-vault at Ovington, which contained the ashes of their grandfather.

“ I should almost have advised,” was Andrew Harrington’s remark on this suggestion, “ that he were buried quietly in town. Under the circumstances of the case, the less observation provoked, the better. If you abide by my opinion, you will consign your father to the grave, in the most private manner, at Kensal Green. It would be a deep humiliation to all of you were any painful demonstration of public feeling to occur at the funeral.”

Mrs. Hamlyn was silent—Walter indignant—Henry surprised. A memorandum in the handwriting of the deceased, found shortly afterwards, having, however, expressly stipulated his place of interment by his father’s side, even the Harringtons, (who, much as they despised and condemned the conduct of Ham-

lyn, admitted his filial piety to have been beyond all praise,) coincided in Walter's desire that his wishes, on this point, should be strictly respected.

Orders were accordingly issued for the opening of the family-vault; and then it was the Hamlyns became first aware of a heart-rending visitation consequent upon the recent event in Lombard Street, which the kindly interposition of Colonel Hamilton had preserved from their knowledge. The amiable wife of the good Vicar, startled into a premature confinement by the tidings, indiscreetly communicated, of Mr. Hamlyn's death and bankruptcy, had fallen a sacrifice to the shock of knowing the inheritance of her children, and the savings of her poor, to be involved in the common ruin. On the second day, fever had come on; and in the height of her delirium, calling upon the grasping banker to render back the widow's mite, the orphan's pittance, the solace of the aged, the bread of the hungry, which he had plundered to gild the waste of his ostentation, the exemplary

protectress of Ovington had given up the ghost!

In order to qualify the letter addressed by Walter to Dr. Markham concerning the burial of him who had been the means of laying his wife in the grave, Mrs. Hamilton judged it indispensable to communicate this mournful intelligence to the family.

Still, the hearts of the young men were too full of their father and his last wishes, not to persevere. Their letter was addressed to Jacob Durdan, as churchwarden of the parish, instead of the afflicted vicar; while the immediate answer of the former was addressed to his respected neighbour, Colonel Hamilton, rather than to the children of him whom he regarded as little better than a common thief.

“If I might make so bold, your honour,” wrote the farmer, who had given practical proof that *he*, at least, understood the meaning of the word honesty,—“I would ask you to recommend the family at Dean Park (whom I should think little enough on if they hadn’t

the luck to call you friend,) not by no means to think of bringing down the body of the late Mr. Hamlyn to Ovington church. I wouldn't answer for the consequence, sir!—I wouldn't answer for what insults might be offered to the corpse. We're decent folks hereabouts, your honour, and no ways given to show disrespect to the dead: But I do believe, as I'm a christian man, that the coffin would be torn to pieces by the populace! It isn't only, sir, for the Savings' Banks, and Loan Societies, and Benefit Societies, as he robbed so shamefully, or the poor firesides he deprived of their hope and comfort, by carrying off the little they'd scraped together by the labour of a long life.—It isn't only that, sir! But your honour do know how the vicar is respected among us, and what Madam Markham was to the poor folks hereabouts. And after seeing that dear lady carried to her grave, sir, with the coffin of her innocent babe by her side, and not a dry eye in the parish from the thought that 'twas the ruin of her poor children that cut short her useful

valuable days,—after *that*, your honour, to see that swindling hypocrite brought down among us with all the pomp of mourning coaches and sable feathers, would be apt to exasperate the villagers beyond what's safe.

“I humbly hope, Colonel, you won't attribute this letter to any anger because of my being put to the cost of deeds for the sale of my farm, to no purpose in the world. Only if you'd be pleased, sir, to apprise the young gentlemen (again whom nobody bears an ill-will for what's no fault of theirs) you'd do 'em a real sarvice, and a kindness to your humble servant to command,

“JACOB DURDAN.”

Such was the first intimation to the young Hamlyns of the abhorrence in which the memory of their father was likely to be held! The lesson was a cruel one; but there is no rebelling against such instruction. Already, the proud spirit of Walter was completely broken by the varied humiliations arising out of the recent events; and when he returned

from laying the head of his father in an obscure corner of one of the metropolitan cemeteries, and saw his mother and sisters profit by the dusk of evening to quit for ever the gorgeous mansion, the remote origin of so much of their present misery, he felt that the glory of his days was departed.—The hateful position in which Alberic Vernon stood towards him, rendered every tenderer feeling connected with that family a source of bitterness. *He* had no consolations—no, not one !—His trust had been in the world—his delight in its pomps and vanities. Out of the vortex of London, he had never framed a wish or indulged an ambition. And what was to become of him, now that society was closed against him,—the giddy pleasures of vanity suppressed, — the aspiring hopes of vaulting ambition blighted for ever?—

If upon Henry the blow had fallen with a less withering influence, it was because the weight was lessened by the participation of an affectionate heart ;—it was because the wound was unenvenomed by the ill blood of

selfish vanity. Henry Hamlyn was deeply humiliated by the shame which had fallen upon his father's house,—and the discoveries which withdrew from his veneration the memory he would have delighted to honour. But while the darkness of his prospects was lightened by the contemplative and unworldly frame of his mind, the turpitude of his father was in some degree extenuated by the moderation arising from a more extended philosophy. To *his* view, a portion of the crime was chargeable upon the vices of our social institutions and the corruption of a degenerate age.

“ But for the idle emulation of my grandfather with Lord Vernon, arising out of an indefinite state of society and confusion of classes,” argued he, “ my father would have remained a thrifty, frugal, laborious man of business. To my father, the old man bequeathed the choice between exposing his prodigality to shame, or keeping up the farce of pretended opulence and competition with the

great. The task of dissimulation once begun, in deference to the faults and follies of his parents,—what so easy—what so gradual—as the sloping ways of duplicity? In the rash attempt to retrieve his fortunes and those of his clients by desperate speculations, he lost all sense of moral obligation. And how excitingly did the cheers of society and fawning of interested dependents stimulate his progress! Who cared to examine the sources of the opulence that conduced to their pleasures or ministered to their advantage?—Moreover, and above all, if his command of money were acquired by unlawful means, his application of it was not wholly unworthy. If he took from the poor, he gave to the poor. His charities were boundless,—his acts of generosity exemplary. But, alas! alas!” was again and again the concluding reflection of the sorrowing young man,—“that ever I should be forced to have recourse to sophistry to palliate the errors of my once-loved, once-respected father!—I remember the time when it would

have been accounted, from one end of the city to the other, the vilest of calumnies to attribute so much as a lapse of discretion to Hamlyn the banker!"—

CHAPTER IX.

Close up his eyes—for we are sinners all!

SHAKSPEARE.

Among those who suffered most, and with most self-command, throughout these sad reverses, was Colonel Hamilton. Unblinded, like the young Hamlyns, by the instincts of nature in his appreciation of the conduct of him who was gone, he experienced all the natural embitterment of feeling arising from consciousness of being duped by those in whom we have placed the trust of friendship. A great gap, moreover, was suddenly created in his existence. He had lost his counsellor,—

his hand-in-hand companion,—his friend,—and without even the comfort of bestowing a regret on his memory !—

Nevertheless, his sentiments on the occasion were characteristic of all the disinterestedness and tenderness of his character. He lamented his loss of fortune chiefly as the diminution of his means of contributing to the happiness of his fellow-creatures ; and, instead of bewailing himself, after Lord Vernon's fashion, as the most ill-used of mankind in being thus treacherously stripped of the major part of a fortune which he had been toiling his whole life long in banishment and self-denial to scrape together, he was never weary of thanking Heaven for the interposition which had detained so large a portion of his funds in India till the day of peril was over, and invested a lesser one in the house in Portland Place.

“ Consider, my dearest Nelly,” said he to his daughter-in-law, “ that, had that fatal question been brought before parliament only three weeks later, the consignment from the

Bombay Company would have fallen into Hamlyn's hands, and been swallowed up with the rest ! Reflect, my dear, what it would have been to have been reduced to absolute beggary,—we, and the poor Johnstons and all ! 'Tisn't for myself ;—for I could have made my way to Ghazerpore and found welcome and work from my old Rajah,—and laid my bones there as well as elsewhere. — For me and Pincher don't want for much in this world, —and sha'n't want even that, much longer. But you, my poor dear child, whom I've taken so much pride and pleasure in filling with hopes of being prosperous and happy, you wouldn't have borne Indy, Nelly ! — For all you're so fond of the warmth of Italy, you couldn't have stood the climate of Ghazerpore. And even if you could, think what 'twould have been to Harry, poor fellow, to find you brought to such misery, and know it was occasioned by the iniquity of his father ! So you see, my dear, 'twas Heaven's own mercy that Moonjee was so slow in fulfilling his engagements !"—

Poor Ellen submitted to congratulate him, as he seemed to desire, on the loss of his two hundred thousand pounds; and secretly blessed the 'tis-well-it's-no-worse philosophy which so thoroughly reconciled him to a stroke of adversity that would not only have driven any other man to despair, but perhaps tempted him to visit upon the son the crime of the ungrateful sire!

“Heaven knows, my dear, 'twould be sinful were *we* to repine, so well off as we are, when others are suffering so much more severely! There's poor Miss Creswell, who had been looking forward to comfort and competence, left without a shilling, and life to begin again, just as she had earned the privilege of rest. There's that worthy Dr. Grantham, Quiddle was telling us of yesterday, with his large family of children, and his paralytic stroke. There's that wretched widow woman, who got hold of me by the arm the day I was coming away from Lombard Street with Harry, and talked about Hamlyn's obligations to her poor dear dead and gone John Darley,—and that

she should be turned out of the stable-yard where she'd bided for forty years. There's Sir Robert Maitland, whom I myself betrayed into the scrape ;—and, above all, there's poor, dear Markham, so broken-hearted, yet so resigned ; with the children crying round his knees for their mother, who, were he to die to-morrow, would may-be be crying for bread !—As to those poor souls at Ovington,—oh ! Nelly, Nelly ! The more I think of it all, the more I feel that I cannot be sufficiently grateful to Providence for such a mitigation of my lot, and the power of yielding them some assistance !”

Another person who drank with submission the bitter lees of the chalice of humiliation presented to her lips, was the banker's unfortunate widow. In the comfort afforded by the succourable hand extended towards her children by the brothers who, through life, had held apart from her husband, and in the unaltered affection of young Dartford for her beloved daughter, she found unlooked-for alleviations.

From the first hour of their tribulation, she

perceived, by the care with which on all occasions the Marquis chose to identify himself with Walter and Henry in their filial endeavours, that his intentions were unchanged by all that had occurred or might occur. And when, at the close of a month's mourning, he pressed for her consent to an immediate marriage, under the sanction of his whole family, Mrs. Hamlyn indulged in pious feelings of gratitude to Heaven for the tranquil destiny thus provided for her daughter, without a single grovelling idea or self-degradation. Conscious of the generosity of Dartford's conduct, she felt that it could meet with no richer reward than the affection of such a heart as Lydia's; and, in according the credit due to the young lover, did equal justice to the merits of her child.

It was from the house of her worthy uncle that Lydia went forth, in soberness and tranquillity, without so much as laying aside her mourning attire, to become the bride of one of the first nobles in the realm. In scarcely any other spot would she have found courage

to leave her mother at such a moment. But the house of Andrew Harrington was one in which Mrs. Hamlyn could abide without a painful sense of dependence. He was a widower. His only child, a daughter some years younger than Harriet, not only adored her cousins, but was eminently benefited by Miss Creswell's sojourn under her father's roof; and towards his sister, the blunt merchant was uniformly and tenderly scrupulous in moderating his expressions and mollifying his deportment. She had no difficulty in perceiving that, if Walter had no severer Mentor, he had also not a truer friend on earth, than his uncle Andrew.

“For that young man, Sophy,” he would sometimes say to his sister, “all that has happened is for the best. The break-up was just in time. He was not *quite* spoiled;—was spared the evil which I am assured awaited him of having a silly, useless, expensive doll of a wife upon his hands;—and has learned the value of worldly friendships and the hollowness of fashionable life. A few more years

to take the nonsense quite out of him, and I don't desire better than to have him for a son-in-law. Little Sophy will take a couple of hundred thousands or so, to the man who chooses to call himself Harrington for her sake (as good a name as Hamlyn, as I fear you've found out to your cost!); and it will be your own fault, my dearest sister, if you do not, in the interim, make my poor neglected girl all you can wish in a daughter-in-law!"

An interruption shortly occurred, however, in the attentions of the aunt, the lessons of the governess, and the delight which Sophy Harrington was beginning to take in the society of her cousins. Soon after the Marchioness of Dartford was settled in her new home, her beloved mother was beset with the warmest invitations.

"You would not hear of a visit to Dartford Hall at my husband's entreaty!" wrote Lydia; "will you persist, dearest of mothers, in your refusal to myself?—I am not half happy here, till I have you and Harriet under my roof."

And when the dearest of mothers arrived

in Shropshire, she found that one of those miracles which prove that wealth can sometimes be a blessing, had been wrought in her behalf! — Such a cottage, — surrounded by such a garden, — and furnished with such elegant simplicity as never cottage was furnished before, — had been completed for her use! — Furniture, plate, linen, books, not only marked with her name, but chosen with such careful and tender deference for all her tastes and occupations! — Not a flower, not an author that she loved, but was there to greet her; and though nothing could be more unpretending than the little snuggerly, it was so well distributed as to contain every thing and every body; — Harriet's and Miss Creswell's room, adjoining her mother's; and not only dens for Walter and Henry, but pleasant spare chambers for Colonel Hamilton and Ellen, whenever they could be prevailed upon to join the family party at Dartford Hall.

At present, they seemed riveted to the Manor. The first removal to Burlington from town was a severe effort to the poor Colonel.

He had scarcely courage to pass the lodge-gates of Dean Park, and almost as little, to survey from his library-windows the Braxham woods overhanging the Hyde.

“ Nevertheless, disagreeable as it all is, my dear, and painfully as I am haunted which ever way I turn by remniscences of poor Hamlyn and his dear wife and girls, I feel it my duty to be here. The place is mine for the next twenty year;—and if I don’t abide in’t, who *will*?—Luckily, the means are left me. I can’t keep it up in quite the style I intended, but we may live here decently, Nelly, and pay our way.—I must look sharper after Robson, and *you* be a bit of a hous’ife, (if Goody Johnston will let you.) For you see, my dear, Ovington has lost every thing in losing Dean Park, (which mayn’t find a purchaser for ages, considering the difficulties about the title,) to say nothing of poor dear Madam Markham, who’ll never find a substitute while the world stands; and this, without considering the ruin wrought in every house within twenty miles round by that sin-

ful bankruptcy ! So if you and I were to absent ourselves, and the village to lose the profit of the Manor being inhabited, in addition to all the rest, I should feel that we had much to answer for !”—

It sometimes puzzled the good Colonel to determine how matters would be arranged as regarded this determination to reside at Burlington, when the period arrived for Henry, who was completing his studies at Cambridge in compliance with the desire of his uncles, to fulfil his engagements with the “ beautiful Ellen,” in compliance with his own,—in a spot so hateful to his feelings from its vicinity to Dean Park. For, with all Mrs. Hamilton’s grateful affection for her untrustworthy father-in-law, she still persisted in her bad habit of keeping her little love affairs a secret from him ;—and had never afforded him a hint either that the word of Lord Crawley and interest of the six Elvaston votes was pledged to procure an appointment abroad for him whom the hints of Lady Devereux and the tact of Lord Edward Sutton readily pointed

out to the family at Ormeau as his successful rival; or that she and Harry had already agreed to spend the first two months after taking his degree in happy companionship with her under the roof of his kind mother, who had already taken the stump of myrtle under her protection, and placed a bracket in her little drawing-room to support Gibson's beautiful bust of Diana.

But if Ellen left the good old gentleman thus fairly in the basket, it was only because she was forming ulterior projects of happiness for himself, which, prematurely to announce, would have been assuredly to mar. Moreover Mrs. Hamilton was not without hopes that the winding-up of Sir Roger Burlington's affairs, which was taking place in the hands of a Master in Chancery, in consequence of the death of the trustee, might enable Lady Burlington to return to England and bring up her son on his paternal estates; in which case, nothing would be easier or more agreeable to Colonel Hamilton than to cancel the lease.

The most painful trial, meanwhile, experienced by Ellen and the good Colonel, among the many that awaited them on their return into Warwickshire, was their first interview with the Vicar. Mortifications they bore without wincing. — The impertinent self-consequence of Barlow of Alderham, who forced himself upon them in a morning visit, for the sole purpose of chanting his Pæans, that the man by whom the county had been disgraced and the funds of its hospital and lunatic asylum plundered, did not belong to one of “ the old county families ” was a thing to smile at ; and the ill-repressed exultation of Gratwycke of Gratwycke House at the certainty that, henceforth, *his* donations to the Warwickshire charities would be first in magnitude on the list, a thing for christianly compassion. But it *was* a severe ordeal to walk through that miserable village,—that village, whose almshouses and infirmary were now closely shuttered up,—that village, whose rags had been taxed and whose barley-loaves rendered scant to swell the profusion

of the base impostor who had so long pretended to act as its benefactor,—to the humble but once cheerful Vicarage, whose household gods that hollow-hearted guest of princes and haranguer of senates, Hamlyn the banker, had stamped irretrievably into dust!—

“ I wish to the Lord o’ Mercy the meeting was over, Nelly !” — faltered the Colonel, as they entered the well-known swing-gate and and the little garden, now weedy and disordered from neglect. “ I can’t bear the thoughts of seeing her chair empty and those poor little ones in their black frocks.—Well ! she’s in a better place !—If any one can be sure of salvation, ’tis such a meek and self-denying soul as *she* was.—Nelly ! I wish the meeting was over !” —

It was a great relief to the old gentleman to find that Dr. Markham had just stepped across the fields to Durdan’s farm. But Ellen, aware how much it had cost them both to prepare for entering the house, was resolved that the benefit of the effort should not be lost.— Besides, she had some little presents in her

pocket which she had brought from town for the children; and after asking to have them brought into the parlour, walked boldly in.

As the Colonel had foretold, it was sad work to look upon the vacant chair and formal, tidy room; in comparison with the litter of the old worktable, on which clothes for the poor were always in progress, or the children's spelling-books with their dogs' ears, lying about as if they had a right to be there. Ellen would have given much but to have seen a skein of silk or ball of cotton on the carpet. She had not felt so heart-bound since she abided under the same roof with the unburied body of the banker!—

Nor were her feelings much relieved when little Kitty made her appearance—hiding her now shy face; led in by the nurse, too happy in having a new visitor to whom she could relate the oft-told tale of her poor dear angel of a dead-and-gone mistress's sufferings; and how, if there was a God in Heaven, Hamlyn, the banker, would be brought to eternal punishment!—

“She never held up her head after the news, ma’am!” said she, while the Colonel turned away to the window, pretending not to hear, but in reality to conceal his emotion. “The poor babe, ma’am, was still-born;—never stirred, the Doctor said, from the moment of its poor mother’s hearing of Squire Hamlyn’s having made away with himself. And at last, ma’am, when the fever and delirium com’ on, ’twas the most affecting thing as ever was heard, how the poor dear soul kept talking of the ruined families in the village, one by one;—how poor old Parsons would have no coals or blankets this winter for his rheumatism,—and what the carpenter’s orphans would do,—and such like;—and then, bursting out a-singing, all as one as she was in the organ-loft; and never did her poor voice sound finer nor more sweet than only half an hour afore she died;—and Master’s hand in her’s, begging her to compose herself, and not sing so;—and *she* laughing outright, and then, a prayer, and then, flying off to Mary Haines, the poor ’oman as went up for

a cancer from Ovington to the county hospital;—and at last, another hymn, as clear and sweet as a nightingale!—Every body present said 'twas the song of the angels!—

“She *is* an angel, Mrs. Smith!” cried the Colonel, turning abruptly round;—“an angel with God!”—

And the poor nurse, whose face already covered with her apron, sobbed only the louder for that assurance.

“If you’d but ha’ heard the poor dear children a-calling after their mamma, sir, those first two or three days!” said she; “I’m sure I thought poor master would ha’ gone distracted! Not that he’s much better now, sir. Look here!”—continued the good woman, opening the door of a little vestibule that led to the Vicarage-garden, and pointing to a bonnet and shawl that were hanging up, which Ellen recognised from having hundreds of times met poor Mrs. Markham arrayed in them, when fulfilling her errands of charity in the village.—“Master won’t hear of these being took down, ma’am, though it goes to

every body's heart to see 'em still hanging there. I got up betimes one morning, afore he was astir, and moved 'em, and thought he'd never miss 'em. Bless you, sir! as he came through the hall to read morning prayers, he saw at a glance they was gone, and know'd nobody'd dare to touch 'em but me. So, 'Smith!' said he, 'let those things be instantly replaced!' And them as ever heard Master speak in *that* tone, sir, know there's to be no reply.—So I went and fetched 'em on the instant, with tears in my eyes. And ever since, ma'am, I've noticed that when poor folks out of the village comes to ask for assistance (and since Hamlyn's failure, master's obliged to think *twice* about granting it, where he didn't used to think *once*!) the first thing as ever he does is to glance up at that poor shawl and bonnet;—as much as to say, if *she* was still here, my poor people, you wouldn't have been forced to come here to *ask* for help!—But God's will be done!"

At the close of this mournful narrative, Ellen, who was petting poor little Kitty upon

her knee, found that her own tears were stealing down the little white shoulder of the child ; whose usual spirits were gone, and who, now left wholly to servants, seemed frightened rather than pleased by the endearments of a *lady*, — a lady who was not mamma ! — She looked up wistfully into the face that was weeping over her ; — for, to a child, tears are synonymous with pain, punishment, offence ; — and for a month past, nothing else had met her little saddened eyes.

At that moment, the Vicar passed the window rapidly, and entered the room to welcome his unexpected guests. He was thin, haggard, pale, — but made an effort to meet them with a smile, — that he might not seem the only one unable to adopt his prescribed submission of — “ GOD’S will be done ! ”

But the poor child allowed him no time for his intended welcome. — Extending her little arms towards him, as though she had at last found a friend, — she exclaimed, with imperfect utterance, — “ Take me home, dear papa, — I want to go home, — I want to go home ! ” —

“You *are* at home, my darling,—hush, hush!—you *are* at home,” whispered the poor father, pressing her to his heart.

“No, no! Kitty wants to go home!”—reiterated the child, in a plaintive, piteous voice. And though that mournful cry was unintelligible to the ears of the Hamiltons, it wrung the heart of the poor Vicar; who, on the day of his wife’s funeral, ere the stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre, had been rash enough to take his infant in his arms, and, accompanied by his sobbing boys, show them the last resting-place of their mother; so that, in after-life, they might know where that holy woman was laid,—and how her coffin had been scattered over with precious herbs by the hands of the poor,—the poor whom she had comforted—the poor whom she had fed;—a tribute how worthy to efface the sprinkling of dust to dust, wherewith the forms of the church symbolically degrade our dead!—

But the impression of this spectacle on the younger child had been most injurious.

While the elder ones, with extended knowledge, recoiled from the idea of darkness and the tomb, the younger, — the tender infant, accustomed to nestle in its mother's bosom, — knew only that mamma was sleeping there, — that before her lay her tender, patient, loving, thoughtful mother. — Thenceforward, she had no home elsewhere! — The Vicarage was empty, her nursery a desert, the parlour silent, lonely, comfortless; even her father no longer the kind, happy, papa, of better days. — The child was right. — She wanted her mother. — Where a mother is, is always *home*! —

* * * * *

We owe it, however, to the patience of our readers to turn a brighter page at parting, and enable them to forget the sufferings of the banker's wife in the consolations of the banker's widow. Surrounded by her prosperous children and beautiful grandchildren, and on the eve of witnessing the happy marriage of her younger girl with Lord Edward Sutton, to the sincere satisfaction of the amiable family at Ormeau, Mrs. Hamlyn retains

all her former angelic serenity,—all her humble trust in the protection of that Providence, by whom, for its own wise purposes, her earlier days were chastened with affliction. Though her friend, Lady Burlington, is happily established at the Manor, she has never found courage to re-visit the neighbourhood ; nor, though their mutual friends for a moment anticipated the probability of a nearer connection between the gentle Sophia and the frank old soldier, to whom she has ever been the object of devoted regard, has she ever sufficiently relaxed from her grave reserve of widowhood, to encourage him to the risk of losing a friend by an attempt to convert her into a wife.

Henry's children meanwhile are General Hamilton's heirs ; nor are they or Ellen less dear to the affections of the excellent mother-in-law, than the noble boys of Lord and Lady Dartford, or the fairy girl of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Harrington.

To repair the evils occasioned by the misdoings of the head of the family has been, of

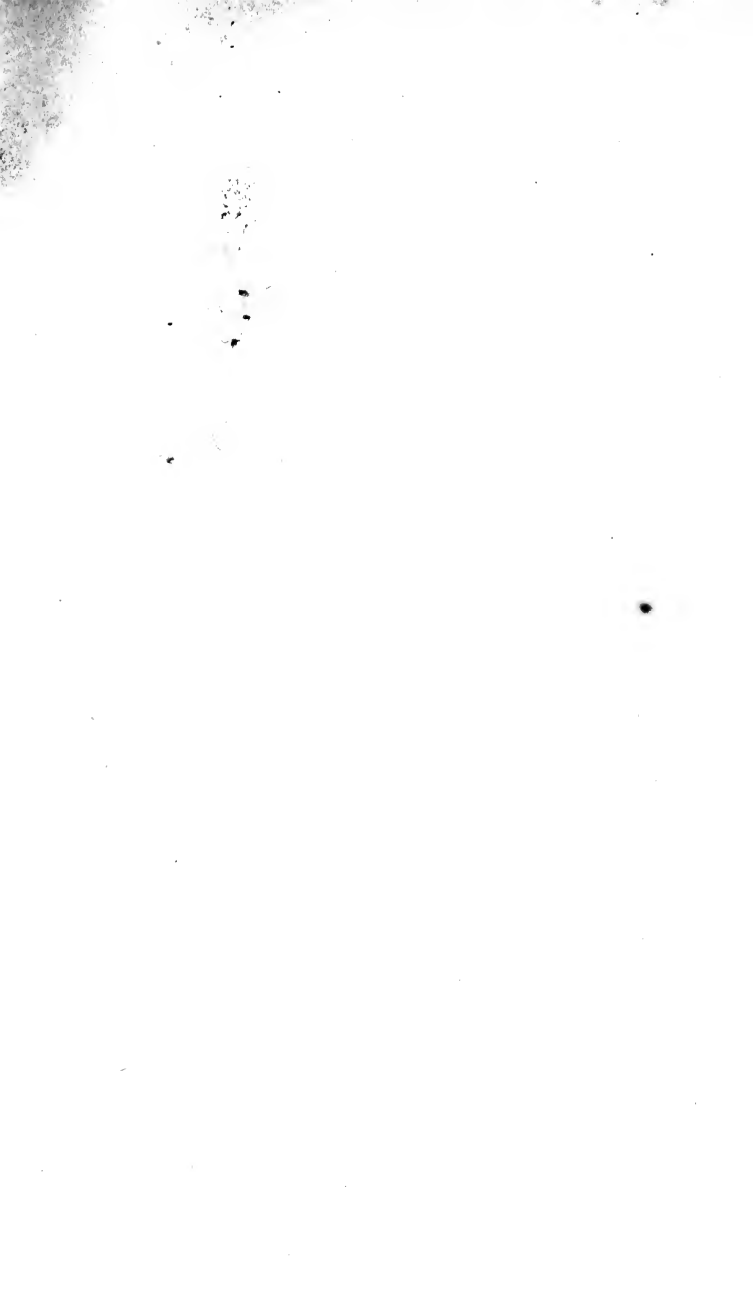
course, impossible. But it is noticed that the habits of both Walter and Henry are frugality itself; and the aid which periodically reaches the poor of Ovington, and the alleviations received by many of the humbler sufferers by the failure of the branch of Hamlyn and Co. can only be referred to the conscientious mercy of his representatives.

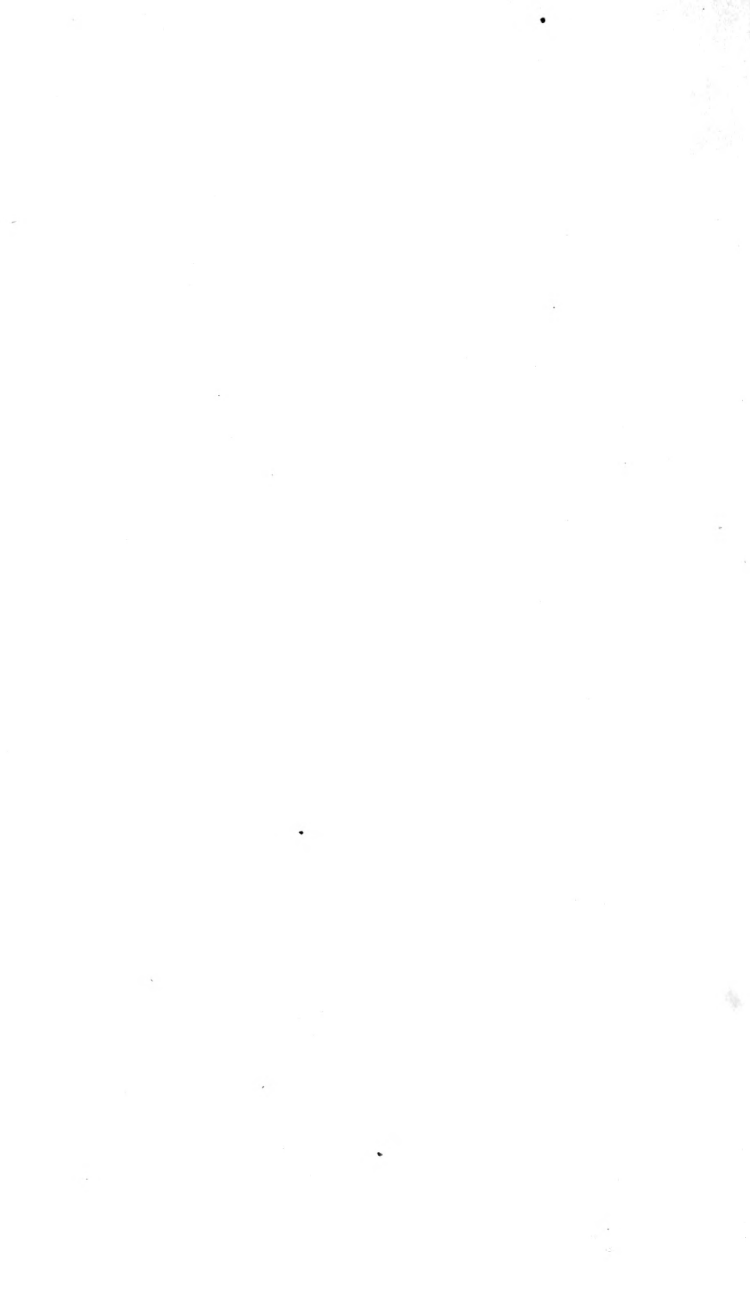
Moreover, even the stern brothers of Mrs. Hamlyn are beginning to foresee so favourable a return from the South American speculations as may eventually compensate the evils so wantonly created by the fraudulent banker, and afford a golden sunset to the stormy days of the virtuous and unoffending BANKER'S WIFE.

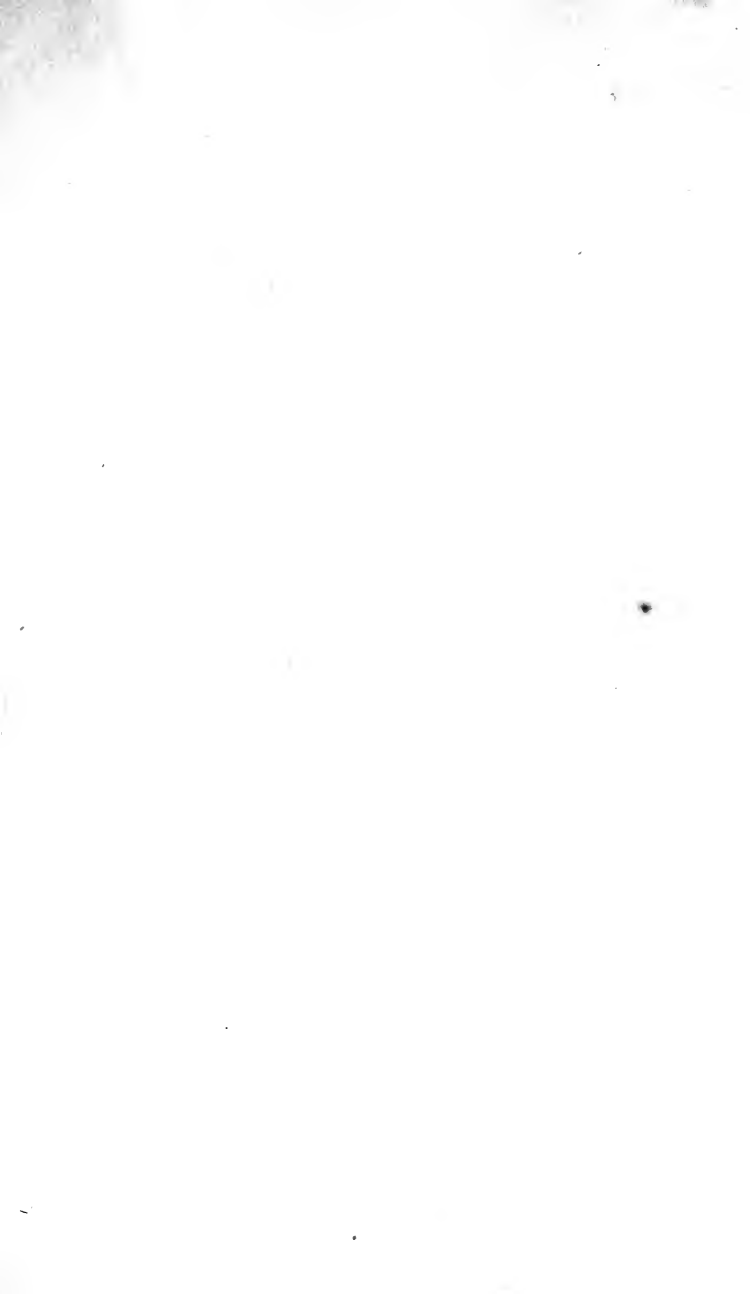
THE END.

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